

Adventure



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closed about
her wrist"

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ADVENTURE

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No.
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1912

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SHE first met him in the Duomo, the great cathedral of Florence. He was hanging on the wall. He had been dead some twenty or thirty times as long as she had been alive, her teeth were chattering with the cold of an Italian midwinter, and she didn't even know who he was, but she was vastly interested in him—in his picture, that is.

That is how Miss Angellotti came to write her stories of Sir John Hawkwood. You will enjoy the one on page 79 all the more for having read her account of the real man:

HE WAS a very interesting-looking person, dressed entirely in mail except for a *berrettone* or cap in place of a helmet; he [was a-horseback, of course, as a soldier should be in his portrait, and carried a general's baton in his hand; he looked broad-shouldered, dominating, and, somehow, Anglo-Saxon, in spite of his Italian setting. I hastily consulted a guide-book. With the exasperating succinctness of its kind, it informed me that he was "Sir John Hawkwood, an English captain of free companies (*condottiere*), who served the Republic in the fourteenth century." There it ceased. At this point I succumbed again to the cold and fled from the Duomo, but with a determination to know more of this Englishman who had strayed so far from home.

He proved an easy person to trace, for all the English and Italian histories which emphasize the romance of old days have plenty to say of him. And the more I learned, the more interested I grew.

Of course, he was most important historically, for he is declared to have been the first real general of modern times. But I suppose the historical significance of a man appeals less to all of us than the human and picturesque side, and this last was Sir John's strong point.

I FIRMLY believe that no man ever had as many adventures as he did—a fact that ought to make him interesting both to those of us who have had many and those of us who have had none; for the stay-at-homes usually love adventure quite as well as the wanderers. Sir John's life reads like the wildest of romances, from the day when he left England as a tanner's son, and became, almost in the famous Jack Robinson space of time, a *protégé* of the Black Prince, a knight, and a famous soldier. This seems a good deal for him to have accomplished; but it turned out to be merely a sort of mild prelude to the real business of his career.

It was when he entered Italy as an avowed mercenary, the Captain of the famous White Company, that Sir John seems to have really entered into the spirit of the thing. Any one who disapproves of the medieval soldier of fortune and does not want to see and thrill over a picture of him in all his glory, had better keep as far as possible from the barest facts about this man. He and his free-lances, frankly fighting for their own gain, but never betraying their employer as the other mercenaries of the time did if they found it profitable, were a combination that kept the whole country on tenter-hooks. Rulers bid for him in a frantic way that suggests a modern auction. Holding the balance of power wherever he went, and writing history with his sword; dealing on equal terms with royalty; fighting twenty-three regular battles and losing only one; making the dukes and princes of the day seem commonplace and uninteresting compared to him, and incidentally making every one of them tremble, at one time or another, at the mere sound of his name—whichever phase of his life you take is a tale in itself, and it all made me despair as I read it, because I saw only too well that no author could ever write about him in a way that would be as romantic as the plain reality was.

AND then, the last part of his life! It was like the end of a fairy-story, with the hero married to the princess and living happily ever after. Settled in Florence, her captain-general for as long as he lived, with a splendid marble villa among the flowers for his home; the greatest power in the land; English ambassador to the Republic, and to the Holy See and Naples; owning lands and houses all the way from the north to the south; riding back from the wars in triumph with conquered rulers at his stirrup and the magistrates of Florence about him; refusing to buy a principality and become a sovereign, as he might have done, because he loved his trade too much—what an end for the son of the tanner! And when he died, after thirty years of such campaigning as would have exhausted most men in a month, I imagine Italy must have breathed a sigh of relief at the idea of settling her disputes without any more meddling from this terrible intruder from across the seas.

SIR JOHN HAWKWOOD ought to be an interesting figure as long as men love adventure, for he was adventure incarnate, a born soldier of fortune with courage, daring, dominance and the power of success raised to the *n*th power. In spite of some natural fourteenth-century failings—a few plain-spoken authorities do not scruple to call this hero of mine a freebooter and a brigand—he was admitted to have, beyond his contemporaries, the virtues of generosity and loyalty which we like to think are the birthright of the true adventurer. All things considered, it is hard to find any figure in the Middle Ages that shows more splendidly than he the type of the adventurers of the past.



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In Winter Quarters

A Story of the
Peninsular War

by
Talbot Mundy

SERGEANT-MAJOR HANLEY—he of the red hair and blue eyes, and the reputation of being the ugliest man in the British army—is the real hero of this story; for he did his duty, and lied like a good man and a soldier, and afterward held his tongue. But, since service well rendered is the best thing that there is in this world, Señorita Ysabella Catania should get some credit; she tried her best to serve her adopted country, and though her methods were not to be commended, her motives were. And she at least showed courage and determination.

She passed for a Spaniard in Spain; that was because her father happened to have been Spanish, and she spoke the language perfectly. And that was how she was allowed to remain in the neighborhood of the British army unquestioned; for England and Spain were allies. She was a woman of good breeding, and to have questioned her

would have been an unpardonable outrage.

But her sympathies were altogether French; she had been born and brought up in Paris, and her tigress heart yearned for the city of her adoption. It was not surprising, though, that she should pretend to like the British, since she was thrown into such close contact with them; she would have been foolish had she done otherwise.

What is surprising is that she should have lived for nearly a year in close proximity to an invading army, and have worked steadfastly and ceaselessly for the French army all that time without losing either her fair name or the right to it. But appearances were in her favor.

Hers was the head of a Galatea, cold-chiseled out of marble, but lit up by smoldering life; she had ripe, red, luscious lips that must have tempted many a soldier-man, but she had, too, the marvelous Spanish carriage that is one-third insolence and

two-thirds dignity. Her well-poised head was garlanded by a wealth of raven hair, and her eyes were deep and dark, of that indescribable combination of colors that is known as black for the lack of a better name for it; they glowed always, but they could blaze up into fury such as even few of Wellesley's untamed officers could face.

When Winter came and the two armies lay and faced each other in an uncovenanted but rigidly maintained truce, she took up her residence in a little village two miles or more behind the commander-in-chief's headquarters, and in the daytime the village street was usually gay with uniforms, for there were not many women just then in that part of the Peninsula to whom an officer could pay respect.

But at night the village was deserted by all except herself and the maid who lived with her. Not even a patrol visited the village after dark. Its one road was worn into yard-deep ruts by the wheels of guns and wagons, and by daylight the walls of the empty cottages echoed and re-echoed to the thunder of supply trains, but at night-time all was silence, and the only sign of life was a dim yellow light that struggled faintly through the lattices of a wooden shutter. It seemed like a village of the dead.

ONE night, though, just as the Winter was breaking up and the first cold rains of Spring were making the countryside impassable, a horseman approached the village; the cloppety-clop-clip-clop of his horse's feet could be heard plainly as its rider urged it over the half-thawed road, and long before either horse or rider could be made out through the murky night the solitary candle was carried nearer to the window, and the wooden shutter opened outward about half an inch, as though somebody had loosened the hook that held it.

The tired horse splashed through a puddle and floundered over a mud-filled rut, and stopped, heaving and blowing, below the window; its rider whistled, and getting no answer drew his saber and hammered on the wall beneath the window three times with the hilt of it.

The shutter was thrown back then as if at a preconcerted signal, and in the square window space were framed the head and shoulders of the señorita. She shielded the candle flame with a hand that showed strength,

and artistry and capability; the flame shone through it, making her fingers seem pink as the dawn, as she moved the candle forward and revealed, below her, the shako and the clean-cut features and the high red collar of a British staff officer.

"Guillermo?" she asked in a voice that seemed strangely harsh from such a radiant woman.

"Your lover!" he answered, seizing the hand that she had rested on the window-sill and pressing it to his lips.

Then he raised himself in his stirrups and threw one arm around her neck, and drew her face toward him. But she freed herself impatiently and drew out a handkerchief to wipe her neck where his arm had been.

"You are cold and wet, Guillermo!"

"Pardon, beloved!" he laughed a little shamefacedly; "for a moment you made me forget the weather. Remember, I haven't seen you for two whole days!"

"I have thought of you all the time, Guillermo!"

"You honor me! But why Guillermo? I'm named William. Loving a Spanish goddess doesn't make a Don of me!"

"I hate your cold English names, and they are difficult to say. Guillermo is easy, and I like it."

He raised his hand to his mustache to hide a slight twinge of annoyance, and shifted in his saddle before he answered:

"Learn to say William, beloved—it's easy enough; let me teach you."

"Yes, I could learn; and when I had learnt—what then? Dust, and the clatter of hoofs, and a good view of the back of a gallant officer as he rode away from me! We women must always learn, Guillermo; men suffer us to learn, that we may learn to suffer; it is always so!"

"What suffering have I brought you? You know I love you. You must know it. Dearest, it is I who suffer. Sweetheart, I have ridden fourteen miles on a night like this to see you, and you tell me I would ride away from you! Is that fair? D'you think you are quite reasonable?"

"Is it reasonable," she answered, "that I should be cooped up here with none to take a message for me? What have I done to Sir Arthur Wellesley that he should refuse me permission to send a message to Madrid? I may send it, he is good enough to say, provided he may read it first. That for your English gallantry!"

She snapped her fingers, and shook candle grease on to his cloak and all but dropped the candle in her vehemence.

"But——"

"But! But not one officer of all the gallant coxcombs who flaunt their plumes past my window has gallantry enough to take the message for me!"

"But, dearest——"

"But! But!! But!!! I love you, I adore you, I worship you! But I will not carry a little message for you to the nearest French picket."

"It would mean disgrace. Why, an officer caught carrying a message to——"

"Oh, these brave English! Thinking always of what would happen if they were found out!"



SHE was silent for a moment, drumming her fingers on the window-ledge, while the officer below her sat his horse and swore beneath his breath.

"I could love a really brave man," she said presently, as though she had just made the discovery.

"D'you mean that you could love me if—if—I took it for you?"

For a moment she did not answer, drumming still with her finger-tips, and looking into his eyes as though she would read his soul and yet tell him nothing.

"This needs no bravery," she answered presently; "a child could do it, but the lines are watched so closely that not even a child could creep through unobserved. It needs an officer who has authority."

"And who will risk his commission—to say the least of it!"

"Brave Englishman! A Spanish peasant would dare risk his life for a smile from the girl he loved. And this is nothing but a personal letter to my relations in Madrid. I have money there and friends there, and I need both, for here I have neither. If that letter were taken and Sir Arthur Wellesley himself should read it, no harm could come of it."

"Then why not show it to him and ask him to initial it?"

Her fingers clutched the sill in front of her, and her eyes flashed again. The rain that beat in through the window had matted her raven hair, and the wind had blown and tangled it; she looked like a fury—together beautiful, but nothing to trifle with. She almost hissed her answer at him.

"Have I no pride? Will I ask favors of a man who has shown me none? Perhaps I should go and borrow money from him—I, whose father would have scorned to sit at table with him!"

"But in war-time."

"Listen to what men do in war-time—*men*, I say! A retainer of my family has come from Madrid on foot; he started on horseback, but the French stole his horse, so he walked with a message for me. He reached the French lines and waited there at the risk of his life, and at last he sent his message through by the hand of a huckster who smuggled it to me beneath some vegetables."

"He has waited there for his answer for two long weeks, working as a fuel-cutter for the French, and tending the camp-fires of their furthest advanced outpost in return for such food as they choose to give him. He is waiting there now for some br-r-rave man to ride up to him and say the one word '*Spero*' to him, and hand him my answer; then this poor menial will walk all the way back again to Madrid and deliver it to my friends who sent him, and in due course I shall receive money and other things I need."

"But who could find him?"

"He waits each night in the shadow by the little clump of trees where the French and English pickets are less than a hundred yards apart—beyond where the Fiftieth Regiment is quartered. He is waiting there now, poor fellow, drenched in the rain, and starving. He does not love me—at least not as you say you love me; but he——"



THERE was a sound of footsteps near at hand and she stopped suddenly and closed the shutter.

"Halt!" ordered the officer. "Who comes there?" The footsteps ceased.

"Friend!" said a voice from the darkness.

"Advance, friend, and give an account of yourself!"

The officer sat his horse, and waited, his left hand on his scabbard, and his right hand ready to draw on the instant if necessary. A man overcoated and muffled to the eyes advanced slowly, feeling his way carefully among the mud holes; when he reached the horse's shoulder he halted and drew himself up to attention and saluted.

"Who are you?"

"Sergeant-major Hanley, sir, of the Fif-

tieth, returning from leave of absence to visit a friend in hospital."

"Have you a permit?"

"Certainly, sir."

He groped inside his overcoat and produced a crumpled piece of paper. The officer took it and held it up toward the light that still streamed through the lattice of the shutter.

"Hm-m-m! That's his handwriting all right. Very well, sergeant-major; give my compliments to my father, will you? Did you leave him well?"

"The Colonel, sir?" He drew half a step nearer and stared hard for a second. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, saluting again, "I didn't recognize you at first. Yes, sir; he was well when I left two days ago."

"Good! Remember me to him. Good-night, sergeant-major; you've a long trudge in front of you yet—you know the way?"

"Yes, sir, thank you. Good-night, sir." And he saluted once more and vanished.

When the splashing and the squelching of his footsteps had died away into the distance the shutter once more opened.

"Who was it?" asked the señorita.

"The sergeant-major of my father's regiment."

"Did he see me, d'you think?"

"I don't know. He has the most uncanny pair of blue eyes in the army, and I believe he sees most things."

"This must stop, Guillermo. The risk is too great. I can not be seen talking through my window to officers at this hour of the night. Here, take this, Guillermo; take it and go! Quick! here it is."

She handed him a package done up tightly in oiled silk and sewed at both ends and sealed. There was no direction on it.

"It is the answer to my people. Remember—*spero* is the word, and the man is waiting by the little clump of trees beyond where the Fiftieth Regiment is, between their pickets and the French. He waits there each night."

"But——"

"Come back when you have delivered it."

"But——"

"And if you still wish it you may bring a priest with you."

"Stop a moment, Ysabella—one minute!"

But the shutter had closed again and the candle was blown out, and the sound of slip-

pered feet retreating through a door at the far end of the room told him that argument at least was over. He sat musing for a minute, fingering the package and wondering what to do with it; then he slipped it into a pocket inside his tunic and gathered up his reins.

"I'll take it," he muttered, "—— if I won't! And if I can find a priest I'll fetch him here afterward by the girdle faster than he ever went to a wedding in his life!"

Then he urged his weary horse into a walk and started off toward headquarters.

II

 WHEN officers, gilded and plumed and glittering, led men to close quarters with a brigaded enemy, the casualties among them were out of all proportion to their number; regimental reputations had to be looked after, and that could be done as a rule only by bravery of the most self-sacrificing sort. So the Fiftieth were very short of officers.

Sergeant-major Hanley quite frequently commanded a whole company as well as being officer-of-the-day two days out of six. He had practically no chance of winning a commission, but he did win the confidence of his commanding officer, and he was called into private consultation in the Colonel's tent more often than any other officer in the regiment.

In return for the confidence, he gave his Colonel a doglike devotion which was thought exaggerated even in those undemocratic days; and ugly though he was, and brusk, and even ill-mannered to his superiors on occasion, the Colonel learned to prefer his friendship to that of almost any other man. The due formalities as between commissioned and non-commissioned ranks were adhered to strictly, but only half hidden by discipline there was a friendship between them that not even the exigencies of the service could destroy.

The Colonel had two obsessions—the regiment and his only son—in that order; and Sergeant-major Hanley had two—the regiment and his regard for Colonel Whitehouse. Both men put the regiment first, as their duty was.

A regiment is not a congeries of men who have been drilled: it is the embodiment of an ideal, and men have the honor to belong to it. It is nearly as deathless as a religion,

and is almost as independent of individuals. Men join it and are taught the spirit of it, and are drilled until they fit into its mold, and then they leave it as time-expired or die in action, but the regiment goes on forever.

So, although all is fair in love and war, and especially when love and war are mingled; and although love, taken by itself, is the most powerful element in the world—there is one case at least where that does not apply, for when love runs counter to the interests of a regiment, the regiment wins.

It was because Colonel Whitehouse and his sergeant-major understood, that they were such perfectly good friends; both of them had one ideal, which they held higher than the other's friendship. The Colonel made Hanley work almost beyond the limit of his endurance, and Hanley did the work, and admired his officer. So the regiment prospered.

When the sergeant-major returned to camp, plastered with mud from feet to waist, wet to the skin, chilled, and utterly tired out, he thought it no hardship to be sent for immediately; he made two privates clean the mud off him as well as they could in the space of thirty seconds—for his affection for Colonel Whitehouse was based on his respect for him—and then hurried to the Colonel's tent.

"Come in," said the Colonel, "and close the flap behind you. You needn't stand—sit down. There's wine in that flask; help yourself."

"Thank you, sir," said Hanley, filling himself a tumblerful and rising to his feet again; "my respects, sir!"

The Colonel nodded and took a closely written sheet of paper from the table beside him, holding it toward the lamplight, and Hanley sat down again.

"I've a letter here from Sir Arthur—the matter's serious."

 HANLEY'S blue eyes took on an even keener look, and he sat forward in his chair a little, as though anxious not to miss a word of what was coming. There were not many sergeant-majors in the army who were favored with a digest of Sir Arthur's private letters, and he knew it.

"We're likely to break camp and resume the campaign in two weeks from now. The French know that, of course, and they're naturally getting ready for it as eagerly as we are. Everything they can find out about

our plans and resources in the meantime is going to be of service to them, and Sir Arthur is very anxious that no information of any kind should filter through.

"For instance, there's a convoy expected at any moment now with reinforcements and supplies; he wants that information kept from the French. All the hucksters and camp-followers have been forbidden to go backward and forward between the armies, and it's easy enough to control that, now that a regular market-place has been established, but news seems to be leaking through.

"Our spies in the French camp report that one or two of Sir Arthur's plans are matters of common talk among the French officers, and even among the men; and Sir Arthur seems to think that as we are the nearest regiment to the French, we are responsible. Now, d'you think the men do any talking between the vedettes?"

"Why, yes, they talk, sir."

"I mean when the French soldiers come over and sit by our camp-fires, d'you suppose that any information changes hands?"

"I'd take my oath it doesn't! The men get on with the French well enough, and they get fun out of trying to understand 'em, but if a Frenchy was to ask impertinent questions he'd get his head broke! The way the men look at it, you never know when you'll be wounded and taken prisoner, and then a friend in the enemy's army is a good thing to have; and the Frenchies, especially the older ones, seem to be pretty good fellows, and we like their wine when they've got any, and they like our rum. But it ends there, sir; there's not a man in the regiment 'ud tell 'em anything."

"I believe you're right, Hanley."

"I know I'm right, sir. I know every man of 'em, and what he's good for at a pinch. Besides, what do the men know that 'ud be any use to the French?"

"That's true too. But it's no use taking that line with Sir Arthur; he has satisfied himself that secret information is reaching the French, and that it's reaching them from somewhere in our vicinity. No amount of argument will do any good; we've either got to stop the leak or else take the blame for it. I don't care for blame that's undeserved, so we must do the other thing."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, now, I suppose you're very tired?"

"I can manage, sir."

"Good. Take some more of that wine; it'll help you pull yourself together. I want you to get your sleep in the daytime, as much as you can from now on. I'll hand over as many of your duties as I can to one of the sergeants. Go the rounds of the vedettes as often as you can manage it, and keep on visiting them at frequent intervals. Keep both eyes open, and watch the French outposts particularly carefully, and if you see any one who excites your suspicion, contrive to hide yourself near him if you can, and watch.

"Understand, you needn't report to me from now on unless you see fit. If you fail to put in an appearance, I'll have some one else perform your duties until you do come. Devote yourself entirely—but especially at night—to what I've told you, and begin now."

"Very good, sir," said the sergeant-major, rising.

"Oh, and there's one other thing: don't be too ready with that sword of yours. In a case like this it's better to make prisoners if possible, and then make an example of them in front of the whole army. I'd like to make Sir Arthur acknowledge that the blame is not ours."

"Yes, sir. Is that a definite order about making prisoners?"

"No. You have discretion."

"Thank you, sir."

And Sergeant-major Hanley saluted and went out backward, and closed the flap of the tent behind him.

III



WHERE the spur of a low hill jutted out on to the plain the French and English camp-fires were placed so near each other that the men of either side could exchange jokes and good-natured repartee without crossing the intervening space. It was not at all unusual to see French and English seated round one camp-fire together, fraternizing and exchanging drinks; even officers of either side exchanged greetings now and then, and discussed what had already happened.

Only what was going to happen was taboo, and neither side even fenced around the outside edge of that subject. "*Au revoir*" at parting meant one thing only—"Wait till the Spring, and see!" The men admired each other, but the war was war to the death!

Not a gunshot from the spur of the hill, and about half way between the closest placed French and English camp-fires, was a clump of bushes that had been left standing there by both sides because of the Winter truce; neither side cared to cut it down for fuel for fear of infringing on the claims of the other side and starting friction before the time came.

It was about fifty yards long by as many broad, and near it a man waited. He had waited in the shadow of it for fourteen nights, squatted on a fallen log, and peering out between the upturned collar of his black Spanish cloak with eyes that never seemed to blink. Every now and then he was summoned by the French vedette to tend the fire, and each time when he had finished he returned to his log again and waited, gazing through the darkness always toward the British lines.

The night following Colonel Whitehouse's conversation with Sergeant-major Hanley was a black one. The rain came down in torrents and beat down the camp-fires until the wet wood sent up little else than smoke, and that hung around and overhead like a pall. The men of the vedettes huddled closely round the glowing embers and drew what consolation they could from the very little warmth they could obtain there, and for the first time for weeks there was no interchange of courtesies between the armies.

The men were too sodden and dispirited to do anything but stare into the spluttering coals and grumble. The space between the armies was deserted, save for the Spaniard; he sat there as usual on his log and waited. Suddenly a British sentry challenged:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

His voice rang out sharply through the night, and was followed by a click as he brought his piece to the "charge."

"Rounds!" said a voice.

"What rounds?"

"Visiting rounds!"

"Advance, visiting rounds, and show yourself!"



AN OFFICER, cloaked to the ears, and unrecognizable, rode out of the murk and approached the sentry. The sentry peered forward to examine his uniform, and came to the "shoulder."

"Guard! Turn out!" he roared, and the men left their camp-fire at the double, and lined up on the left of him.

"Present—arms!" ordered the corporal, and for six seconds the men stood with their pieces held in front of them at the salute.

"Shoulder—arms!"

"Give up your orders!" said the officer.

"To challenge all comers—to stop all communication with the French lines—to fire on any one who refuses to halt when ordered—to give the alarm at the first sign of movement on the part of the enemy—and to turn out the guard to all officers," said the sentry.

"All right," said the officer. "Guard—dismiss!"

The men ran back to their camp-fire in a hurry, but the corporal still stayed by the sentry in case the officer had any further orders.

"It's a bad night, corporal. Anything out of the usual happened?"

"No, sir."

"Pon my soul, I can't see the next camp-fire from here even; it's the worst night we've had! Whereabouts is the next vedette?"

"Four hundred yards, sir, beyond that clump of bushes, and a little to the left. There, sir—you can see the glow of it every now and then."

"I see. Gad! What a night for a surprise! It's a good thing our friends the French know how to keep a bargain! Which is their nearest vedette?"

"There, sir." The corporal pointed straight in front of him.

"I suppose this is the point where the two armies lie closest together?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! Well, good-night, corporal."

"Good-night, sir."

The corporal saluted and ran back to his camp-fire; and the officer rode on—toward the clump of bushes. He was out of sight and in the shadow of them before the corporal had snuggled down again between the men. The Spaniard who was sitting on the log stayed motionless—almost invisible against the black background of the bushes—and the officer was nearly up to him before he could make out whether or not he was a man.

"*Sperol*!" he said then cautiously, and the Spaniard rose to his feet with his hand outstretched. The officer groped with one hand inside his cloak and produced a package—a bulky little package, wrapped in oiled silk. The Spaniard came one step

nearer to take it, and a man leaped from the clump of bushes and a sword licked out of the darkness like a lightning-flash, and the Spaniard fell forward—his head all but severed from his shoulders!



THERE had been hardly a sound as yet. The horse reared in fright, but the turf was good in that place and the rain had softened it; the stamping of his hoofs made hardly any sound, and a strong hand that seized his rein soon steadied him. The officer's right hand went to his sword as if by instinct, but the sword was missing.

Whoever the new arrival was, he was quick and had his plans made; he had seized bridle and sword at the same time, and the scabbard with the sword in it lay on the ground.

"Curse you! Let go of me!" hissed the officer, afraid to raise his voice for fear of the vedette. He struck out with his fist and spurred his horse, but the same right hand that had disarmed him now seized his in-step; the horse plunged forward in answer to the spur and swung round on the tightening rein—and the officer pitched on to the ground on his shoulder! Almost before he had reached the ground his assailant was on top of him, pinning him by the throat and peering into his face trying to recognize him.

"So it's you, is it?" he panted, driving one knee into his stomach to quiet his struggling, and reaching with his right hand for his sword.

"Curse you! Le—let g-g-go o' me!"

"One moment, sir!"

It was not easy to draw his sword with his right hand and hold down a struggling officer with his left, but he gave an extra thrust downward with his knee, and as his captive writhed under the pressure he was able to twist a little sideways and release it.

"Prisoner's what you ought to be—drum-head court-martialed—stripped o' your decorations—marched in front o' the drums—an' shot! But I'll save you that for your father's sake!"

And as he said it he placed his sword-point against the officer's throat and drove it home, till the point stuck out on the far side and pinned his victim to the ground. There had still been scarcely a sound.

The horse had cantered off a little way, but he had stopped before he had gone far, and was nibbling the twigs now on the far

side of the clump of bushes. Sergeant-major Hanley stood up and looked at the horse, and then at his handiwork and then at the horse again.

Then he drew his sword out of the wound and wiped it carefully, driving it down deep into the ground and removing all traces of blood from it. Next he stooped and felt under the Spaniard's cloak.

"Thought as much!" he muttered, drawing out a long, flat-bladed knife. He studied the wound carefully for a moment, and then the knife-blade. "Bah!" he muttered, "they'll never notice the difference."

Then he bent down and drove the knife into the wound, and left it there. Next he buckled on the officer's sword again and drew the sword out of the scabbard, and wetted it thoroughly with the Spaniard's blood. He paused then for a moment, and thought again.

The officer was lying face upward, contorted by his death struggle, and the Spaniard lay ten paces from him, in a heap—with his head nearly doubled underneath his chest. Hanley looked from one to the other and then dragged the officer to within two paces of the Spaniard and turned him over on his face and left him, with his right hand stretched out in front of him and his sword laid out on the ground between him and the Spaniard.

Then he stooped and picked up the oiled-silk package and placed it in his pocket. He took one more look at the scene of the struggle, then walked once over the ground carefully to make sure that he had overlooked nothing, and started out to catch the horse.



FIFTEEN minutes later he rode up to Colonel Whitehouse's tent and dismounted and asked to be admitted.

"I've news, sir!" he said, when he had closed the tent-flap behind him and saluted.

"Well, Hanley—out with it!"

"I captured this, sir."

He held out the package, and the Colonel took it and tore it open.

"Pon my soul!" he exclaimed excitedly; "that's good work, Hanley! Look at this! A map of the British lines, showing stations and strength of regiments, details of reinforcements, full list of magazines, giving quantities of powder and ammunition stored

in each, number of sick in hospital, extent and equipment of convoys expected shortly—why, man alive! and look here! details of Sir Arthur Wellesley's plan for the prosecution of the coming campaign! Who copied that, I wonder? And there's more here; look! Hanley, this is the most fortunate thing that ever happened! Tell me how you came by it."

"I hid, sir, as you suggested, and I saw a Spaniard sneaking between the vedettes. He saw me and bolted back toward the British lines, but a mounted officer who was on a round of inspection caught sight of him and gave chase. He tried to bolt then for the French lines, but the officer overtook him and they killed each other before I could get near enough to interfere. I searched the Spaniard and found this package in a pocket under his cloak."

"You did well. Who was the officer?"

"One of Sir Arthur's staff, sir."

"Who was he?"

There was nothing in the words, but the Colonel had detected something indirect underlying Hanley's answer.

"Who was he?" he repeated.

"Your son, sir!"

The Colonel's eyes narrowed and his jaw dropped for a second. He looked as though Hanley had struck him unexpectedly.

"God! sergeant-major!" he exclaimed after a moment. "This is an awful blow!"

"He died doing good work, sir," said Hanley.

The two men stood and faced each other in silence for about a minute, the Colonel's face going gradually grayer as he fought down the emotion that was all but choking him.

"Where's his body?" he asked after a minute.

"I called the nearest vedette, sir; they're taking care of it."

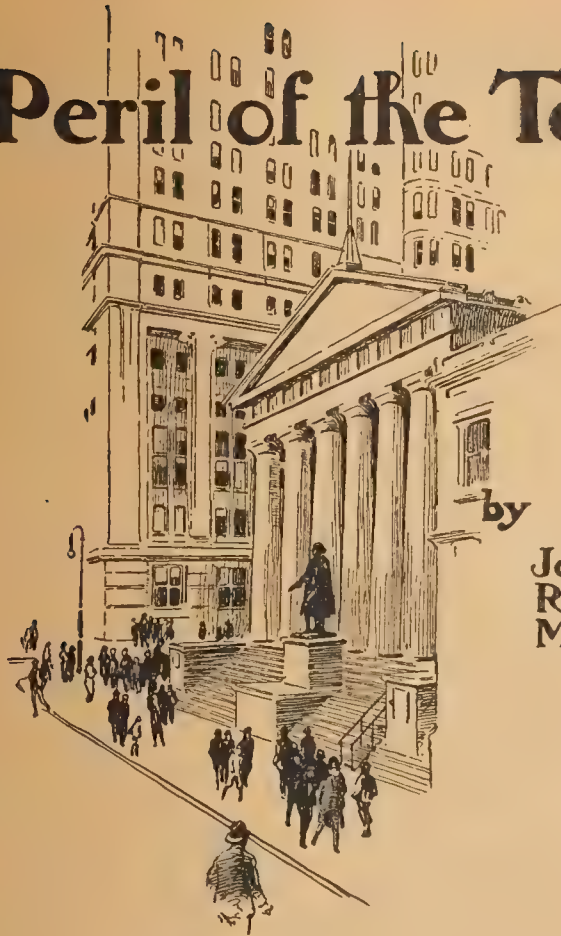
"Did he——"

"Yes, he died game, sir."

"Very well, sergeant-major. I'd like to be alone for a few minutes—you may go."

And Sergeant-major Hanley stalked out of the tent, hollow-backed and straight-shouldered, and turned in in his own ramshackle quarters. He slept like a child till morning, for he had no neglected duty on his conscience; he had acted rightly by the regiment, and had saved the honor of the only man he loved.

The Peril of the Temple



by

John
R.
McMahon

ADINGY Greek temple at the bottom of a well of sky-scrapers—the chief temple of the money-changers in the metropolis—had been long closed for the day's business. There were few sounds within: a low voice, an echoing footfall, the murmurous half-ghostly rumor of clinking coins. All sound was at once oddly magnified and dampened by the peculiar spaces, large and small, of the granite edifice.

Thus the clatter of gold in the northwest corner weakened in traversing a long, low corridor, expanded to a large metallic whisper in the amplitude of the rotunda, and, angling into a room at the southwest extremity, became a muted sibilance that a miser might have enjoyed as the very soul of gold.

In the southwest room—sanctuary of the

temple—sat a small, snowy-haired man. Above his head perched a life-size gilt eagle. Before him was a flat, glass-topped desk. He looked at a tall clock flanked with autographed presidential photos. He reached nervously for the telephone, changed his mind and gave an impatient tug at a maroon curtain which intercepted too much of the departing light. Beyond the iron-barred window were fluted columns of granite that chiefly kept the sanctuary in twilight repose.

A heavy step reverberated, destroying the golden sibilance. The man at the desk looked up with an expression of satisfaction.

"Nelson,"—when the big-bodied, smooth-faced visitor was comfortably seated,—"I don't want to make myself ridiculous and I don't want any mistakes to happen—that's why I asked you to see me. It's

your business to prevent mistakes, and I trust you not to let me seem ridiculous. Probably I've thought too much about my responsibilities and all that. The upshot of it is that I want to consult you."

A vibrant murmur filled the pause before the stout, ruddy-faced visitor, who had something of the style of a rural sportsman, inquired,

"Has there been a loss?"

"Oh, my, no! Not yet—it's a case of calling the doctor early. I am responsible for—let me see—here is to-day's balance." He put on tortoise-shell nose-glasses and glanced at a slip of paper. "Yes. About one hundred and fifty millions in gold, eighty in silver, fifteen in paper and the rest. I'm worse off than a multimillionaire, Nelson. He only keeps titles. I have to keep and guard cash. Besides, it isn't mine; I'm custodian for the Government. I'm under heavy bond. If I'd known the strain of the thing I would never have taken the job." He sighed despondently.

Like a wise physician sympathetic with the vagaries of a patient, the Secret Service official had listened. Now he spoke quietly:

"In what direction do you suspect anything irregular?"

"I don't know—exactly. . ."

"If you're troubled about the way money is brought here in open trucks——"

"It isn't that, Nelson. I'm not responsible until it gets here."

The snowy-haired speaker smiled wanly and glanced at the depopulated asphalt of Broad Street, angle-jointed to Wall Street's dip, from the churchly height of Broadway.

The detective, when at length he had learned all that the other knew or feared, made a few generally reassuring remarks, like a physician who is not inclined to discuss a case with a patient, and departed.



NEXT morning Kate Hart was summoned to the office of the Secret Service.

"I have a case for you," said the big-bodied Chief, "that may beat that Fort Wentworth affair, and then again there may be nothing to it. Anyhow, it will be a nice quiet operation."

"I like that kind," observed the slender, blonde young woman, occupying herself with veil and handbag.

"We want to find out," resumed Nelson, "why somebody is throwing things on the

roof of the Sub-Treasury. They're used to having things thrown at 'em in the daytime. All the stenographers in the office buildings make it a mark for gum and hairpins. But this happened at night. The first time a watchman reported it there was a sharp noise and rattle; the second time it sounded like a wad of something soft. Here is a marble, one of the three-for-a-nickel kind"—his big fingers upheld a little pale-green sphere streaked with ivory-toned wavy lines—"picked up in the alley on the Assay Office side, which probably accounts for the first noise."

"Is that all?" inquired Kate, absently matching the marble with an opal on her finger.

"That's all to start on."

"And you think from that that some one is trying to turn a trick?" Her tone was mildly skeptical.

"My dear young lady," said the Secret Service chief, "circumstances alter cases. A thing may be harmless in one place and dangerous in another. It's no crime to stare in a post-office, but if you stare too much in a fort you're liable to arrest. Anybody who is up at two o'clock in the morning making a target of a Government building which contains two hundred and forty-five millions in cold cash, must give an explanation for his conduct."

"The Sub-Treasury is a fort in itself, isn't it?" asked Kate.

Nelson clipped a cigar with desk shears.

"It's an old-fashioned fort—out of date. When it was put up, they hadn't invented dynamite and chrome steel and electricity. The walls are four-foot granite, but the windows are barred with soft iron. Some of the vaults have new doors, but there is nothing as up-to-date as the system that fills the space around a vault with high-pressure steam.

"The old builders didn't figure much on an approach through the sewer, and they couldn't imagine the chance of a tunnel starting from a subcellar lower than their foundations. Up in the attic there is an arsenal. Plenty of rifles, some Gatling guns and a lot of hand-grenades. The Gatlings could be used through the attic windows on a mob, and the bombs—hand-grenades—could be dropped through holes above the main entrances; you can see two holes if you look straight up behind the pillars. All this is fine for a mob attack

from below, in the daytime when there are enough men to handle the guns and bombs, but how about an enemy in a skyscraper fifteen stories above the building?"

"You don't need to look at me that way," said Kate. "I'm not the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations."

"There is something to find out," he continued, thinking aloud. "Gold weighs a ton and a half to a million dollars. Would any one but a lunatic try to get it? Impossible. But this is the day for impossible things."

A first step in the investigation was to look over a bound volume of typed reports on the habits and mode of life of all the employees in the Government temple. These reports were the result of a periodical shadowing of the employees, which had last been done three months ago. They were like scientific data, more easily obtained than classified and digested; often revealing, when closely studied, astonishing new truths. In the stress of other work Nelson had rather neglected the study of the present reports.

"Subject left building 5 P. M.," read Kate over Nelson's shoulder. "'Went to Tom's café, had two drinks; walked to McCann's 5:15, had one drink; went to Regan's, had three drinks; stopped at The Palace and had one drink——'"

"Oh, that's his regular route to the Brooklyn Bridge," interrupted Nelson. "After seven drinks, always in the same places, he takes a trolley car and goes home to bed. That man is safe."

Other employees were pendulums between home and political clubs, home and bowling-alley, chess club or billiard-room.

"Here," said the Secret Service chief after some moments, "is a man we'll keep a special eye on—John Brayle, one of the tellers."

"Why?" asked Kate.

"He has no habits—not even bad ones. He's as irregular as a dollar watch. A man without a habit or a hobby thinks too much. Brayle's shadow lost him twice, and that shadow was a good one. He's been here ten years and has very little saved—and he's unmarried."

II

 SOON afterward, Kate Hart, a small black bag in hand, was tripping toward the Sub-Treasury. Viewed from the slope of Broad Street, the temple

was perched on its own little acropolis; but the elevation was lost at the rear, and in a larger view the building was dwarfed and dominated by sky-scrapers on three sides. The severe Dorian columns and the triangle of empty gray space above them contrasted with the luxuriant pillars and the vivacious pediment statuary of the Stock Exchange façade.

When Kate had ascended innumerable steps, past the bronze Washington, and stood for a breath-taking moment beside a massive column, she could not resist an upward glance. In the lofty soffits above the doorway were, as Nelson had said, two shadowy holes designed for the dropping of explosives upon the heads of assailants.

Within the marble-paved rotunda, lanced by a thin beam of sunlight that came through a glass dome, there was the hurried activity of the closing of business hours. Youths of collegiate air with wallets fast to leather-covered chains around their waists; men with satchels of greenbacks followed by other men who acted as their guardians; a soldier in uniform with final papers and pay check; a beshawled old woman with a pension check—all these were entering or leaving the queues at the brass-barred windows on right and left. A broad aisle centered the rotunda. White-painted iron-work fenced the passageway on either side.

Above the hum of voices and the brisk footfalls on worn marble sounded the day's fortissimo of clash and clatter in the coin division. Several millions in gold, which had just arrived from a French steamship dock in two truckloads at the Pine Street entrance and had to be counted, gave the climax of the Midas symphony.

Kate was guilelessly looking up at a gallery behind Corinthian columns, where white-bearded patriarchs taped packages of paper money as worn out as themselves, when she was approached by a bareheaded young man.

"Can I do anything for you, madam?" he asked politely.

"Oh, thank you," said Kate with a warm smile. "This is the first time I've been here and I'm quite confused. You see, I'm the cashier—the new cashier—of a restaurant, and I was told to come here and get my small bills exchanged for large ones. And I was really nervous about carrying so much money in this bag through the street."

"You don't need to be," said the young

man, smiling protectively. He had wide shoulders and a pronounced jaw. "You're safe with any amount of cash anywhere in the financial district. This is your window. But while you're waiting for the line to thin out, you might care to look around a bit."

"Thank you; I'm awfully curious about the Sub-Treasury," responded the blonde cashier.

"That stone set in the wall," said the young man, pointing, "was stood on by George Washington——"

"Dear me," gurgled Kate, "how could he stand that way?—oh, how stupid of me!—of course the stone must have been flat when he stood on it."

The young man laughed. "These columns are monoliths. This is the window for redeeming old paper money. Which restaurant did you say you are cashier for, Miss——?"

"It's a ladies' restaurant," said Kate smoothly. "My name is Josephine Ward," she added. "May I ask whether you are——"

"I'm Tom Sullivan," he replied, "one of the detectives here."

"A detective!" she breathed with awe. "What a responsibility it must be to guard all the millions in this place!"

"Nothing to it," he said modestly. "I can tell a crook a mile off."

At the black-on-gold-lettered window, where she exchanged her bagful of small bills for a few large ones, prolonging the process as much as possible, Kate made a careful study of the man who had no habits. She readily identified him with a picture that the Secret Service chief had shown her. John Brayle was low-voiced, well-poised. He had a long head with brain room, steady gray eyes, reserved yet pleasant lips. He was evidently more than an average cog in a financial machine. Beneath his thoughtful serenity Kate fancied there was a trace of worryment. Perhaps this impression was due to Nelson's suggestion.

She was sure at least that it would take considerably longer to become acquainted with Brayle than with Tom Sullivan. Helpful and courteous to a degree, the well-built teller did not seem overborne by the charms and graces of the new customer. Whereupon she decided that, apart from professional duty, it would be worth while

to stir up Brayle's interest. She thanked him with a voice of melody and a smile of enchantment.

As she passed through the low, white-painted corridor of groined arches toward the Pine Street exit, where laborers drew hand trucks piled with small canvas bags and the clatter of gold rose to the volume of a cataract, Mr. Sullivan stepped up to her.

"Like to see the counting machines?" he inquired loudly in her ear.

"Thank you very much—I'm in a hurry to-day. Please ask me next time."

She went on, thinking that the affable Mr. Sullivan would likely prove a nuisance. It had happened before that when fishing for trout she had hooked a catfish.

Not long afterward, her costume somewhat modified, Kate knocked at the door of a flat under the eaves of one of the sky-scrapers that dominated the Sub-Treasury. A middle-aged woman in a Mother-Hubbard opened the door.

"Are you Mrs. Fleeer?" asked the visitor sweetly.

"Yes, ma'am. Will you step in?"

"Thank you. What neat, cozy quarters—flowers even! And what splendid air and magnificent view! I'm sure I'd like to be the janitor of a sky-scraper and live among the clouds."

"You'd be hankering for the ground and folks around you, ma'am," said Mrs. Fleeer. "My husband gets to the ground, but I never do."

"Well, of course, that's the drawback—lack of connection with the world. Especially for the children, and that's why I'm calling. You have children, haven't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, two. Robin is seven and Elsie five—they're hiding."

"Oh, I see them! Peekaboo! You see, Mrs. Fleeer, I'm the traveling secretary of the Janitors' Children's Plaything Society. You know there was a society that distributed potted flowers among the people. We distribute playthings for janitors' children—free, of course. First I want to know what playthings your children have already."

Mrs. Fleeer brought forth several toys in states of dilapidation. As to marbles, her children had never had any. She was sure they had never seen such a thing as a marble.

When the visitor produced a red, woolly horse and a flaxen-haired little china doll,

Robin and Elsie dashed into the room and took possession with squeals of delight.

III

 NEXT morning Kate became a widow. Heavily swathed in the cloth of grief, she began a canvass from the third floor upward of the offices that fronted on the Dorian temple. It was not necessary to investigate the floors below the roof level of the Government building across the narrow street. In each office of lawyer, broker and miscellaneous business concern, the young widow told a legend with due regard for harmony in case of comparison by the tenants.

She wished to invest some life-insurance money that had lately come to her. She wished legal as well as financial advice. In several offices, after a lengthy chat, she discovered that she had been talking to the wrong person and withdrew with profuse, charming apologies. Clerks and stenographers, in the absence of their employers, gave a plenitude of information.

On the fifteenth floor there was a ground-glass portal with the inscription,

MOSES J. BLACKWORTH BONDS

Within the office, a well-dressed boy in a tall collar sat in a swivel chair with his patent-leathered feet on a flat mahogany desk. The boy was reading a sporting supplement. He withdrew his feet and turned to the visitor with a languid air. Mr. Blackworth was out; might be in at any time; had no regular hours. Kate helped herself to a chair and noted that the small office was expensively furnished. There was a Persian rug, a morocco divan, a spherical steel safe.

The boy was not inclined to conversation, and gave the visitor grudging answers from the shelter of the sporting supplement which he had resumed. He admitted he had a comfortable job and good pay. He had been employed here three weeks, and looked forward to becoming a bond broker like Mr. Blackworth.

 BEFORE she could resume her rôle of restaurant cashier, Kate was summoned to Nelson's office.

"I was mistaken about that marble,"

said the Chief. "I've been inquiring about it."

"What is the mistake?"

"It isn't one of the three-for-a-nickel kind. I sent around to all the jobbers and jewelry houses. It's a peculiar variety of jade that isn't in the market."

"You might look up connections with the museums where they probably have such specimens," she suggested.

"I'll do that. And I'll find out if there are any mineralogists among the Treasury employees or their friends."

A muddy-shoed, bedraggled and malodorous laborer entered the office as Kate left.

"Chief," he snorted, "I'll resign from the service if you send me into another sewer! I was almost drowned!"

After hearing the report of the operative who had played the part of a human mole in the sewer beneath the money temple and had been carried almost into the East River by a rush of water, due to an unexpected test of the high-pressure fire system, Nelson remarked,

"If we don't get somewhere soon I'll begin to suspect an airship."

The theory was untenable in view of the state of aerial science and the specific gravity of gold; it was an idea verging on the grotesque, yet it haunted the imagination of the Secret Service official. Undoubtedly in the near future if not immediately there would be peril to treasure places from above as well as below and around them.

 KATE was unable to avoid the attentions of Mr. Sullivan when she appeared at the Sub-Treasury. She was dragooned into the coin division, where currency was counted on a sort of coffee-machine. Mechanical counting for gold as well as silver had been lately adopted. A sack of gold was emptied into a hopper and, as an operator turned a handle, a swift stream of yellow disks fell from a spout with the crash of multiplied cymbals.

"Yes, ma'am," said a grizzled, twinkling-eyed old man in a white apron, "Tetrazzini can't sing like that. You might call this the music of the future—for most people."

"It'd pay to make phonograph records," observed Mr. Sullivan, "and sell 'em on Fifth Avenue as a cure for insomnia."

"A charming lullaby," agreed Kate. "Why not make a whole opera out of it? At least it would be splendid for a heaven

motif, and there could be a lot of angels with wings grinding it out on coffee-mills."

Mr. Sullivan exhibited the protective features of the chamber of music, which included wire netting to the ceiling and Colt revolvers in holsters strapped to desk legs. An inner stairway led to the arsenal in the attic.

 THE next day Kate appeared at John Brayle's window at an hour when there were few customers and Mr. Sullivan was absent. She wore a fetching tailor-made suit. She smiled with gay friendliness.

"I am very sorry, Miss Ward," said the gray-eyed courteous teller, "that this twenty in your package is not good."

"It's not good?" she gasped, bereft of her cheerful smile.

"It's a counterfeit," he replied, holding up the yellow-backed note, "but an unusually fair one. I can't blame you for being deceived by it."

"Oh," cried the young woman, "I—I will have to make it up to my employer. He warned me about that. And I have spent—" She gulped a sob.

Brayle's intellectual face was all sympathetic distress.

"If you will tell your employer what I have said about the quality of this counterfeit, I am sure—"

"No, no, he isn't that kind of man. I don't even dare to tell him about it. He would discharge me. I must make this good to-day so that he won't know. And I have only carfare!"

"If I could help you in any way," said Brayle slowly. "Perhaps a temporary loan—"

"That is very, very kind of you," she murmured with a shy look into his flushed face, "but I'd rather not. Perhaps you could help me another way. I have a piece of jewelry"—she unclasped a brooch at her neck and passed it to him—"that is a family heirloom. You might tell me where to pawn it and how much I could get on it."

He studied the brooch, applying a pocket magnifier to it.

"This is a beautiful thing, finely carved, and it's a rare kind of jade. It might be worth a hundred dollars. I know something about jade, but of course—"

She watched his face; he was perturbed.

"Then please tell me where to take it."

"I'd rather loan you the cash. If you insist, I'll keep this as security." He smiled a little forcedly.

The blonde cashier, with some demur, accepted the offer.

When Kate reported the result of the try-out, the big-bodied Chief of the Secret Service leaned back in his chair and smoked a meditative cigar. His mind was still occupied with a weird dream which he had been compelled to investigate.

He had dreamed that a master thief, one of those criminals who apply science quicker than capitalists and governments, had inserted a wire in the Sub-Treasury's principal gold vault and by a method similar to the electroplating process had subtracted, molecule by molecule, a mountain of wealth. The fantastic vision had so obsessed Nelson that he visited the vault. There were tiers of canvas bags piled above the height of a man. None of this hoard was weighed or counted except when a new custodian for the Government took office.

The seals on the bags were intact and no wires were visible.

"So you think John Brayle is all right?" inquired Nelson, emerging from his meditation.

"He's one of the most all-right men I ever met," replied Kate. "Just because he happens to know jade, is no evidence—"

"And it's no evidence to be kind-hearted toward a good-looking girl."

"Thank you," said Kate. "Without admitting your accusation, I think he would be kind to any one."

"You think he is absolutely on the level?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had a shadow on him last night," said the Chief. "One of my best operatives, and the man couldn't hold him half an hour. He jumped several surface cars and finally got away in a taxi. That corroborates the old report on him. Brayle is wise!"

Kate was speechless for the moment.

"I don't know whether to have you rope him out thoroughly," continued Nelson, "or whether to burglarize his rooms. He lives with a married sister in the Bronx. You could probably rope him, but it would take time. I want quick results. A jimmy is quicker than an argument."

"It isn't absolute proof that a person is crooked because he dodges a shadow. And there are other employees——" She had an unpleasant thought bearing on the reasons why men who are not criminals dodge shadows.

"I'm watching the others—several," said the Chief. "But Brayle looks to me like the one best bet."

 KATE resumed her canvass of the office buildings. On her third visit to the fifteenth-floor quarters of Moses J. Blackworth she found that person in. He was a short, stockily-built man, with a cold blue eye, a seamed brow and a tight mouth sheltered by a French cut beard streaked with gray. His hands were big and muscular. He spoke with a slight, indefinable foreign accent.

"I am a widow, sir," said Kate with a corroborative rustle of her funereal garb, "and I wish to make an investment."

"Did some one recommend me, may I ask?"

"I saw your name on the door, as I was passing," she replied. "I was dissatisfied with another broker whom I consulted. And your name being familiar to me as that of a friend of my dear husband, I thought you might be related. There are not many Blackworths, I believe."

"Where does your late husband's friend live?"

"In Illyria, Ohio."

"We are not related," announced Moses J. Blackworth.

"What bonds would you recommend for an investment?" asked the caller. She felt his eyes coldly boring her.

"That depends, madam, on the amount you wish to put in. I presume you desire absolute security?"

"Oh, yes, I must have absolute security. And I want ten per cent., because, you see, I have only eight thousand dollars."

"I am afraid, madam, that ten per cent. and absolute security are incompatible terms. Five and a half is about the extreme limit."

"That's very disappointing," quavered the widow. "Won't you inquire for me and see if you can do better?"

"Frankly, madam," said Mr. Blackworth with cool precision, "I would prefer not to handle your account. You expect and you need a high rate of interest. I could not

conscientiously recommend high-paying bonds. You would be dissatisfied if you consented to take what I offered. So if you will pardon me, especially now, since I have an important engagement within ten minutes——"

The bond-broker arose with a profound bow, seized his silk hat and, accelerated Kate's departure by jingling a bunch of keys.

"Another virtuous citizen in Wall Street," commented Nelson on Kate's report. "I suppose you think Blackworth is all right, too?"

"No, I don't. I think he wanted to get rid of me. I felt creepy when he looked at me with that cold fish eye. There was something queer about him."

"Any man in this district who would turn down eight thousand dollars is more than queer," said the Chief. "Unless he has his eye on a bigger stake."

IV



BRAYLE had become very friendly to Kate. He told her not to hurry the repayment of the loan and invited her to dine with him in an underground French restaurant on Nassau Street. There were screened racks of dusty wine-bottles around the walls, cozy nooks and alcoves. Snails and bouillabaisse were the specialties of the establishment. While they were eating, Brayle told Kate that he appreciated her as an intellectual woman, the only kind that interested him. When she asked what evidence he had seen of her intellectuality, he laughed.

"It is like detecting a counterfeit, Miss Ward. One's judgment is based on a multitude of little impressions."

"I have those little impressions, too," she observed. "But people try to discourage me by saying they don't mean anything."

"Don't let them," said Brayle, winning a crab's claw from his bouillabaisse. "They mean a lot—they're scientific."

The conversation turned to music and minerals. On both subjects Brayle was deeply fluent. He said that he had quite a collection of minerals, including jade and other semi-precious stones. Kate expressed a wish to see them. He replied that he would be very glad to show them if she would call at the home which he shared with his sister.

There had been moments of silence. Brayle, looking down, his delicate fingers playing with a tiny glass filled with opalescent, oily liqueur, spoke:

"Miss Ward, I'll confess. I was not interested in you on purely intellectual grounds."

"What was it, then?" she breathed with a palpitation not wholly professional.

"It was because you resembled a girl I was engaged to. We were to have been married in a few months—it broke me up for quite a while."

"What happened?" asked Kate after an interval.

"A difference of opinion. I felt it a duty to help out a relative financially. My salary was small. It meant struggle and postponement. She would not wait. She married another man."

"Tell me more."

"That's all." Brayle, with a smile, touched his glass to hers. "You could expand it into a novel without improving the story. It's just a part of life."

As a part of her duty—chiefly—Kate stood in an alcove and prolonged the process of being helped on with her fur-trimmed coat. Brayle, however, neglected his opportunity.

On the way out, passing a table in a recess screened by an arabesque design of wine-bottles, Kate heard low voices speaking in a foreign language. One of the voices struck a reminiscent note in her ear, a veiled and unlocatable memory. There were two men at the table. Their faces could not be seen.

She glanced at Brayle with a light comment. His face had a bitter look that shaded into apprehension.

"Do you know either of those men?" she asked when they were in the street.

"I ought to know one of them," replied Brayle with forceful calmness. "He has nearly ruined my life."



MR. SULLIVAN met Kate in Wall Street next morning and informed her with a cheerful grin that he had done a little piece of shadow work on a blonde who pretended to be cashier for a ladies' restaurant. Instead of going to any restaurant, she visited the office of the Secret Service.

"I see you are a detective," said Kate tartly. "Won't you come around to the

office with me? I think Mr. Nelson would like to see you."

Mr. Sullivan was delighted. He was still more gratified when the Chief, complimenting him on his acuteness, said that he had arranged an important assignment for him which would require him to sail for Bermuda on a steamer leaving in half an hour. Instructions in cipher would be cabled to him. The cipher message, which Mr. Sullivan received in due course, advised him to come home and not butt into things again.

When Kate informed the Chief of the invitation to visit Brayle's home and inspect his collection of minerals, Nelson remarked,

"I'll save you that trouble. I had a second-story connoisseur look over the collection last night while the family was out. In fact, we took a few samples. Here is a jade marble that matches the one thrown on the roof of the Sub-Treasury."

Kate said nothing for a few moments.

"I know John Brayle is all right," she exclaimed finally. "And that's why I'll tell you something else that happened in that restaurant. There were two men at a table——"

"You wouldn't have told me," commented Nelson when she had concluded, "if you had thought it would hurt Brayle. That's the drawback to woman in the detective business."



MOSES J. BLACKWORTH, whose voice Kate had recognized in the restaurant, did not seem to be in his office when the Secret Service men called late in the afternoon. At least he did not respond to knocks at the door, which was locked. He was somewhere in the building, for he had been seen to enter it and all the exits were guarded.

Kate was at a corridor window. From the height of the fifteenth floor the financial district of America's metropolis appeared strangely shrunk. Wall Street was a single-step gap between stone and brick walls. A flat tar roof far down represented the lordly Stock Exchange. The Sub-Treasury was a hut, its gray angled roof surmounted by a button dome and a toothpick flagstaff. At the bottom of Broad Street's canyon were black, moving insects. It was after four o'clock; the insects were moving homeward. Beyond the scene of littleness were sparkling waters and hills at the

horizon. Here the city, there the country.

Nelson, picketing his men in halls and stairways, saw Kate in the window recess.

"This is no place for you," he said rapidly. "Something is going to tear loose. Blackworth is in there. He's armed, and he's got several bottles of stuff on his table that may be 'soup.'"

"How do you know he is inside?"

"I had a man with opera-glasses in the building across the way."

"Unless you promise me something, I won't go," she said.

"What is it?"

"Don't arrest Brayle. Give him a chance to explain."

"Bosh!" snorted Nelson. "Go home. I'll do all the kid-glove business that is necessary."

V



AN EMPTY office adjoining the bond-broker's was entered after the lock had been oiled. There was a bolted oak door separating the two offices. Operatives in felt-soled shoes moved like ghosts over the tessellated floor of the corridor and took up positions assigned to them.

At five o'clock the last tenant on the fifteenth floor had gone. Nelson himself stood at the door which bore Blackworth's name. The big-bodied Chief held aloft a short steel bar with a chisel end, as if he were an orchestra conductor with uplifted baton. An operative in the corridor held up his hand, ready to signal the Chief's move to another operative equipped with a steel bar standing at the door in the adjoining office.

"Blackworth, do you surrender?" called the Chief.

The distant murmurous clamor of the home-going city was the only answer.

"Now, boys!"

The bars descended with a simultaneous crash. As the doors were wrenched away from their jambs, there were two quick pistol reports. Half a dozen operatives leaped into the room. Some bent low to meet a crouching enemy. An operative seized Nelson in the belief that he had been shot.

Blackworth lay back in his chair. A ghastly wound furrowed his seamed forehead. The blood spreading over his face was converged by his gray-tinged French

beard so that a single stream trickled from the pointed end upon his white shirt-bosom. There was another wound in his chest.

Flasks of a yellowish liquid were on the table. Nelson ordered them carefully handled and had them placed in the spherical steel safe, the door of which stood open. Some documents, automatic revolvers and boxes of ammunition were removed from the safe.

Most of the operatives retired. In the corridor they passed around a flask of whisky as an antidote for the shock they had sustained in seeing the flasks of yellowish liquid.

Blackworth was laid on the morocco divan. Nelson sat beside him, a stern confessor, and plied him with quick, urgent questions.

"Don't ask me; I'm dying!" he moaned. "Let me die!"

"You won't die until you answer my questions!" said Nelson brutally.

"Where is the doctor? I'm suffering—"

"No doctor or priest until you talk! I'll make you talk if I have to follow you half way to hell!"

The ambulance surgeon was not admitted until the Secret Service inquisitor had wrung the last bit of essential information from the dying man.

"You must be a hyena," remarked the surgeon impartially to Nelson.

"I am," said the Chief. "And I got some points in a medical college where they carve live animals."



BRAYLE was not arrested. But after he had told his part of the story he did not care to remain in New York. Two men were deported to France as escaped convicts. The suicide of a bond-broker and the deportation of escaped convicts were reported as unconnected items in the day's news, and there was no undesirable publicity of an audacious attempt against Government treasure.

"Blackworth's right name was Mannard," said the Secret Service chief, elucidating the case to Kate. "He was a half-brother to Brayle. After making a lot of trouble for his folks in this country, everything from forgery to breaking into post-offices, he went to the other side. He swindled fellow Americans, taught the foreign crooks some tricks and learned a few him-

self. He was arrested in France for murder. He cabled Brayle to help him. Brayle was fool enough to do it; sent all he had and pledged his salary for years ahead to guarantee the loan. Because of helping this scoundrel, Brayle had to give up marrying the girl he was engaged to."

"He told me about that," said Kate.

"Mannard escaped the guillotine," continued Nelson, "but he was sent for life to the penal settlement in New Caledonia. After several years he lit out with two fine birds. They got away in a boat to the east coast of Australia. Then they all came to this country by way of Vancouver. They did some safe-blowing in the West and arrived in New York. Mannard got next to Brayle, blackmailed him, raided his mineral collection—that's where the jade marble comes in—got inside information about the Sub-Treasury and pretended to open a bond-brokerage office in the building across the way. Brayle suspected that Mannard was still crooked, but he did not want to expose his half-brother and have him sent back to jail for life. He didn't think Mannard would have the nerve to pull off any raw jobs. He didn't know what to do. It was when he went to see Mannard that Brayle dodged our shadows."

"Did Mannard really expect to steal gold?"

"No, he was too wise for that. He was after paper—a few millions of green and yellow backs, all baled up and stowed away in old-fashioned safes. It's light, easy to carry and to negotiate, especially the bales of dirty old stuff turned in for redemption. Old paper money is good anywhere and you can't trace it. It's the best loot in the world. One thousand notes weigh three pounds and a half. A million dollars in fifties would weigh about one-fortieth of gold of the same value—seventy pounds instead of a ton and a half. I give Mannard credit

for good judgment and monumental nerve. He planned everything himself and didn't trust anybody more than was necessary. He told his chief accomplices, the two French crooks, that they were going to turn off a trick on a private bank in Brooklyn. If they had known what the game was, they might have weakened. He was going to get two more men, Sing Sing graduates, to help out in the final operation."

Nelson lighted a fresh cigar and sent smoke rings ceilingward. "The attack would have been made on a stormy night. While his men are blowing their way into the Sub-Treasury—a matter of five or six minutes' time—Mannard is in his office, fifteen stories above ground, dropping little bottles of nitroglycerin on the roof of the Government building. This wrecks the attic, kills some of the watchmen inside and prevents the rest from using the bomb holes above the doorway.

"The crooks down-stairs are safe behind and under granite, several feet thick. The street lamps have been jarred out for a mile around. If the police and the burglar-alarm people arrive before the job is finished, they are scattered with a few extra bottles of explosive dropped in the street. If any escape, they think the sky has caved in. It's black midnight and hell falling on top. One man could hold off an army that way. There was an automobile getaway.

"It was a good scheme," concluded the Chief of the Secret Service, "but Mannard made a little mistake when he used that jade marble for his experimental target work. He wanted to estimate how far to throw his explosive packages. A common marble would have done just as well."

"Gold," said Kate after a meditative interval, "makes a nicer sound than that rustling, crinkling paper. It has no germs either. I like gold."





The Vagabond Indian

by Ledward Rawlinson

PROBABLY because his father had been a squaw-man, Nicolas was a vagabond Indian. He did not go to Mass, he refused to take his turn tending the llamas of the priest, and the annual pilgrimage to the sacred Island of the Sun in the middle of Lake Titicaca always started off without him. But he had been baptized and vaccinated by six different missionaries, he knew how to shoot craps, and he had an American watch.

A nomad, an outcast from his tribe, his only companion was a ring-tailed monkey that violated every rule of nature by living at an altitude of thirteen thousand feet on the roof of the western world.

The intrinsic value of the watch was one dollar. Nicolas got it from a *gringo* in exchange for three hundred dollars' worth of fine chinchilla skins. You would become prejudiced against him at the start if I told you how he came into possession of the skins.

The monkey had no value on the hoof; in the form of stew-meat it would have

brought about two pesos at the Sunday-morning market.

One day, when Nicolas was but sixteen years of age, he left his baked-mud hut outside the baked-mud village of Sicasica and went for a trip to the Corocoro mountains with old man Denmore, the prospector. Denmore taught him how to cook strange food out of cans that was far better than the *chuño* and *charqui* which usually fell to his portion, gave him whisky on fiesta days that did not burn his stomach like *pisco*, and treated him as no man had ever treated him before.

Therefore the vagabond renounced his people. With nothing but the primeval wilderness to hear, he stood up alone in the moonlight and cursed every man, woman and child of the Aymara tribe. "From henceforth I am white," he said boldly to the cold, white stars, and with a handful of flour borrowed from the commissary he smeared his copper-tinted cheeks until he closely resembled a circus clown.

Old man Denmore had been celebrating

the death of Francisco Pizarro and several other deceased friends that night, so when Nicolas stuck his ghostlike, grinning face through the flap of his tent, the intoxicated prospector imagined that one of their restless spirits had called to show him the error of his ways and collapsed to the floor, howling in terror at the apparition.

Finally, to his intense relief, the little Indian spoke, and in faltering Spanish told of the resolution he had made; whereupon Denmore's heart resumed its normal action, and Denmore himself staggered laboriously to his feet. To show his appreciation of the fact that Nicolas had taken out naturalization papers in the Great White Race, the prospector immediately gave him a glass of whisky big enough to choke a camel, cautioned him on the advisability of a strict observance of the laws of neutrality, and pinned a counterfeit Mexican dollar on his poncho in the way of a decoration.

Next morning, doubtless in the hope of getting more whisky or another decoration, Nicolas tried the whitening process on the monkey, but without success. The little animal absolutely refused to swear allegiance to the strangers from over the seas and promptly licked and rubbed himself back to his aboriginal color.

Had old man Denmore stayed sober he might have located what is now the bonanza of the Corocoro Copper Company, and thereby satisfied his lifelong ambition to drink himself to death in champagne in the Palace Hotel at Frisco. As it was, the only thing he discovered was the mummified skeleton of an Inca with skin like old parchment and long black hair. He found it in a sitting posture in a vault cut in the side of the mountain, and nearly died of fright when he did so. However, it was better than nothing, so he roped the gruesome relic on the top of his pack, and on returning to Sicasica presented it to Dillon, the contractor who had grubstaked him.

"Well," said Dillon with a laugh that shook the rafters of the hotel, "it's a case of silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give unto you."

And as Denmore drained his glass, he agreed that this was the case.



A MONTH after the ignominious return of the prospecting expedition, a tall, loose-jointed object with the flour-whitened face of an Aymara

and the clothes of a two-hundred-pound American came loping down the track into the railroad camp at Viacha, followed by a ring-tailed monkey. The object in question was Nicolas in one of old man Denmore's discarded suits. The coat hung down in folds from his angular shoulders, and his skinny legs were lost in a pair of great baggy trousers that flapped most ridiculously at every step. Poised at a rakish tilt on a mop of uncombed hair was a wide-brimmed hat of felt. His feet were bare.

When Viacha recovered from the shock, Nicolas licked his lips and bashfully asked the crowd of sun-bronzed Americans gathered round about him for a job.

"Can you cook?" asked the storekeeper with a grin.

"*Si, señor,*" declared Nicolas, proudly displaying the Mexican dollar as though it were a diploma from a New England cookery school, "I can make the *pastelito Americano limon.*"

Now this was an astounding statement, for *pastelito Americano limon*, ground down into plain United States English, is lemon pie, and Viacha had been pieless since the early days of the camp when Quong Chang, the Chinese cook imported from Callao, had a row with a Chilean foreman and hurriedly departed for the banks of the Yang-tse-Kiang or wherever good Chinamen go.

Chang's successors had all been swarthy Peruvians, Bolivians or Chileans, and none of them savvied how to make pie. Of a truth they tried—yes, they tried hard; but the stuff they turned out couldn't be penetrated with a rock-drill. They weren't pies at all; they were projectiles.

Though the doubting Thomases of Viacha put him through a withering cross-examination that was almost sufficient to stunt his growth, Nicolas stoutly maintained his ability, and to put the seal of truth on his statements, he made the sacred gesture of his tribal creed, blissfully ignoring six different baptisms and as many pairs of hand-made socks that he never wore.

Therefore the little Indian was engaged on trial at the unheard-of salary of one hundred pesos per month, with ominous threats of sudden death if he failed to make good.

Good wasn't the word for it. There isn't a superlative in Europe, Asia, Africa or Boston strong enough. He was a whirlwind success. By eight o'clock that night Nicolas was seated on the only cushion in the only

armchair in the Viacha camp, smoking imported Havana cigars and drinking imported American whisky with all the *sang-froid* of a Waldorf Astoria habitué who knows the house detective well enough to call him "George."

The lemon pies of the vagabond banished forever the fond memories of pies that fifteen mothers once made. Viacha went wild, hysterical with delight, and before they carried him helpless to the best bed in camp, Nicolas had acquired a ten-peso increase in salary, a pair of odd shoes, a white shirt and a ten-horse-power, self-starting alarm-clock.

Jealous of the sudden fame of his master, the monkey escaped from his chain the following morning and embarked on an uncharted career of reckless villainy. After pouring a bottle of red and a bottle of black ink over the timekeeper's pay-rolls, the little rascal paid a visit to the hospital tent where Bill Potter, the track foreman, lay sick in bed.

 THE young doctor sent down from New York unintentionally expired from pneumonia three days after reaching Bolivia, and pending the arrival of another, the duties of honorary surgeon devolved upon Windy Jim Smetton, the camp blacksmith, who had more spare time than any one else. Having once been a butcher on a West Coast steamer, Windy was simply aching to try out some of the nickel-plated instruments of torture in the hospital cupboard, so the moment Bill Potter came into camp all doubled up like a giraffe with a cramp, Windy looked at his tongue and solemnly diagnosed the case as a severe attack of "pleuro-appendicitis."

The "pleuro" was merely intended to add additional gravity. Much to the disappointment of the honorary surgeon, however, Bill refused pointblank to undergo the customary and fashionable operation, but the blacksmith assumed complete control of the situation by administering a hatful of morphine capsules under false pretenses, and was just about to chisel out the vermiform appendix of his unconscious patient with a miniature jimmy when the monkey jumped on the bed and scared Windy so much that his hand wasn't steady enough to shoe a mule for days, much less practise surgery, blacksmithery, or other allied trades.

If Windy had caught the mischief-maker, Nicolas would have lost his traveling companion then and there. Not being able to do this, he contented himself with a few unnecessary, unprintable remarks about primates and simians in general.

Bill Potter was all right in a few days, but unless he reads this he'll never know what a narrow escape he had from dying a martyr on the altar of Windy Jim Smetton's vivisectionary ambitions.

The next place on the monkey's visiting list was the powder-house at the end of the yard, the door of which was opened to allow of the shipment of several cases of dynamite to be used in blasting out the Viscachani cut. Fortunately for every one, he was detected by the powder man and scared off, else it is more than probable that there would be a hole in the ground where the village of Viacha now stands.

After that the monkey called at the store-room and quickly located a basket of reasonably fresh eggs obtained at great cost from Cochabamba Province for the exclusive use of invalids. When the storekeeper happened along, the little villain had broken them all and was busy scrambling the yolks with his paw.

The storekeeper, too, said a few unkind words and made a savage lunge at the monkey with a shovel, but the animal got safely away and remained at large, a menace to public safety, until hunger drove him back to the cook tent.

 IN THE days that followed, Viacha reveled in a blissful debauch of lemon meringue, and the fame of the cook spread to the distant corners of the *pampa*, to Oruro, to Sucre, and even Potosi. If a man fell sick, the Company no longer sent him on a tedious, expensive journey to the coast, but to Viacha, for which reason it came to pass that there was more sickness during the reign of Nicolas than at any other time.

Through the freezing dawn, the long hot day, and far into the arctic night he toiled and sweated over the stove, always singing a native song, always ready with another pie. The monkey was constantly by his side, and having exhibited a desire to lead a better life and deport himself like a respectable primate, he became a great favorite, the mascot of the camp. To perpetuate the memory of three dozen eggs that he had laid

waste, he was christened with the name "Omeletto."

Whenever the steel-eyed General Manager of the Bolivia Railway Construction Company was away from headquarters, Viacha was crowded with engineers, foremen, bridgemen and timekeepers. By day they sat at the greasy tables of the mess tent filling their half-starved stomachs with endless slices of freshly-baked pie, and by night they drank whisky and played poker in the Hotel Ferrocarril, a dingy, ill-lighted place, run by a Texan who had been chased out of every port on the west coast of South America.

But for some reason Omeletto began to lose flesh. All day long he sat in a sunny spot outside the mess tent, gazing wistfully across the sterile *pampa* to the great glacier-covered mountains beyond. At times he wailed plaintively like a little child.

Every moment that he could spare from his work, Nicolas held the little animal in his arms. With tiny eyes that seemed strangely human and full of trouble, Omeletto would look up at his master and jabber appealingly in a tongue that no man could understand, then look anxiously back at the frowning fortresses of ice, miles and miles away.

One morning there came to Nicolas a great revelation: of a sudden he realized what ailed his little pet, and as they sat together in the glaring sunshine of that bleak plateau far above the clouds, the light of sacrifice crept into the vagabond's eyes.

"Iremos," he said softly; "we will go."

And somehow Omeletto seemed to understand, for he cuddled up closer and talked excitedly till his shrill little voice was a scream of delight.

That same afternoon the paymaster arrived. As proud as the Emperor of all the Russias, Nicolas walked to the pay-car, followed by Omeletto, made a weird cross on the pay-roll, and received his hardly earned wages.

About eight o'clock, when the work of the day was over, the vagabond entered the Ferrocarril, a tired, melancholy look on his flour-whitened face. On his shoulder sat Omeletto and in his pocket rested the result of a month's work—one hundred and ten pesos in crisp one-peso bills. Slowly he crept through the crowded room and wiggled into a post at the roulette table where he won thirty Bolivianos on "columns" on

his first bet. A roar of delight arose from the company, in appreciation of which Nicolas immediately ordered a round of drinks. Then he reached down in his pocket for more ammunition and played again. He knew nothing whatever about the game; he just planted his money wherever it suited his fancy. This time he lost. With trembling fingers he lighted a chocolate-colored cigarette and scooped out another handful of pesos, dropping them uncounted on the table. Again he lost.

"You better take your drink and quit," warned big Tom Fannigan, the track foreman. "These games are all crooked, anyhow."

"No, *señor*," replied the vagabond as he spilled a glass of whisky down his throat, "I stay like the Americanos—to the finish."

Moving to the crap table, Nicolas threw the balance of his wages down and seized the dice. This was a game he understood; old man Denmore had taught him how to play it during the long, cold nights in the Corocoro mountains. He knew he could win at craps. But luck was against him; on the second shake his money disappeared and with an involuntary sigh he stole quietly out to where the stars clustered like jeweled flowers in the sky.



WHEN Viacha woke next morning a flurry of snow was sweeping across the empty *pampa*, and the thin, cold air was more piercing than ever. By seven o'clock every man in camp was dressed and impatiently stamping up and down, waiting for the breakfast bell to ring. Fifteen minutes passed, half an hour, still no bell. Finally the storekeeper rushed out to the mess tent to demand the reason for the delay.

The place was deserted, the stove cold.

With an angry oath he piled on the firewood, and after pouring a cupful of kerosene over it, applied a match.

"I've a mind to fire Nicolas when he comes back," he muttered savagely, as he put a great pot of coffee over the fire; "he deserves it, all right."

But Nicolas had fired himself. When he appeared in camp late that afternoon it was easy to see that something had happened. The flour had gone from his face, and instead of a cast-off suit of American clothes he had returned to the wide pantaloons and the bright red poncho of the Aymaras.

In his usual bad Spanish the burly storekeeper addressed the little Indian, vociferating his opinion of the Indian race till the breath whistled through his gold teeth like the wind through a cave.

Nicolas sat calm and impassive through it all.

"Voy," he said, as he affectionately stroked the bewildered Omeletto, "I am going." And the tears came tumbling down from his eyes.

Then the storekeeper changed his tactics. He even went so far as to offer to refund the amount of the wages Nicolas had lost in the gambling-house if he would return to work; but in vain. And although every man in camp immediately quit his work and coaxed and cajoled him for an hour, the little Indian was adamant.

To all of their pleadings he gave the same laconic answer: "Voy."

He offered no reasons, he held no grudges; he was just going, and to no man would he tell whither.

A Bolivian cook came out from La Paz, and amid gnashing of teeth Viacha went barren and pieless again. The most tantalizing part of it all was that every day for a week Nicolas could be found sitting in the same sunny spot near the mess tent, quietly fondling his little pet. But he was no longer a singer of songs; there was an unfathomable sorrow in his eyes.

On the eighth day the vagabond failed to appear, and somehow Viacha did not feel quite the same.



SIX months passed. They were busy days, those days in Viacha. The restless General Manager had given instructions that the railroad tracks had to be laid into Oruro by the Fourth of July, and every man was straining to the limit of human endurance to celebrate the day by sending a screeching locomotive across a *pampa* that had been silent since the world was made. This, mind you, at an altitude of thirteen thousand feet, where a tropical sun shines through the thin air and scorches the life out of a man by day and an arctic cold freezes the very marrow in his bones by night.

One afternoon, as an empty construction-train came sweeping into the yard, the master mechanic noticed a drunken Indian, homeward-bound from a fiesta,

lying face downward on the track. The engineer had not seen him; he was busily waving his hand to a little dark-eyed *señorita* from whom he had been absent many days.

With a roar and a swish of steam the great locomotive plunged unsteadily forward over the newly made road-bed.

Quick as a flash of lightning the master mechanic seized the Indian by the poncho and pulled him clear just as the engine thundered by.

But it was not a drunken Indian; it was Nicolas. Utterly exhausted by the effects of a long journey, he had toppled over like a stricken bullock.

Tenderly they carried him to the hospital tent and laid him on a cot, a ragged, wasted figure with hollow cheeks and deep-sunken, feverish eyes. After a dose of brandy and a little broth his throat trembled and his eyelids hesitatingly stirred. Gradually he emerged from the stupor and opened his beady black eyes.

"Where have you been, Nicolas?" asked the doctor softly.

"I took Omeletto home," replied the little Indian feebly. "We traveled for a great many suns till we came to the Cordilleras, the land of ceaseless snows. Over the range there's another country—nothing like this—a tropical forest where the nights are warm and everything is green. It's a better country than the *pampa*—there's fruits and flowers and birds and butterflies. Omeletto's brothers and sisters are all there—hundreds of them. They recognized him in a minute and pulled his tail and asked him where he'd been. And Omeletto told them all about the *pampa*, where everything was barren—no trees, no flowers; nothing but llamas and vicuñas and——"

He broke sharply off, gasping for breath. His face, so prematurely worn, had a ghastly hue, his eyes were full of pain. For a long moment there was silence.

"Then Omeletto came down from the trees," he continued in a hoarse whisper, "and jumped around just like he did in the old days out in the Corocoro mountains. He was so happy. When he went back to play with his brothers and sisters again, I sneaked quietly away. He came looking for me; I could hear him cry. I hid in a hut till it was dark and then I started back to the *pampa* alone. I was sorry to leave

him behind; it was hard to do it, but he was so happy. He belongs in the green country over the range and I belong here." For the fraction of a second there was silence again. Then slowly, remorsefully: "I thought I'd come back and make some more *pastelitos*."

The doctor smiled weakly.

"You shall, Nicolas," he said, "when you are well and strong again."

But the little vagabond could not wait. When the camp filed into the mess tent that night there was just one lemon pie upon the table—one of the lemon pies of old.

On the kitchen floor lay Nicolas—dead, a smile upon his lips! And by the flour smeared over his face did they know that another soul was counted into the Kingdom.

Stray Sheep

by
Frederick
William
Wallace



"LICK" JIMMY HAYNES, the Bayport shipping-master, was having a hard time with the crew of the Anchorville bark *Pole Star*. He had picked them up indiscriminately from the various boarding-houses in the large seaport town, and as the all-nation gang had cashed their advance notes, they had already absorbed a skinful of the liquid "rotgut" brewed for the non-critical consumption of sailormen outward bound.

Newly signed crews are notoriously hard subjects to handle. They regard the coming voyage as a sort of semi-voluntary imprisonment or slavery, and, with the few dollars they have and the short hours between signing on and going aboard their ship, they endeavor to drown sorrow in potent spirits. Though diplomatic in herding unruly crews

for outward-bounders, Haynes could not stop them from having their last spree on the beach, and when a sailorman is half-seas-over he regards shipping-masters with an unfavorable eye.

Crossing the Bay of Fundy with his charges, en route to Anchorville where the bark was lying, the shipping-master had his feelings hurt in various ways. The *Pole Star's* crew, with studied insolence, designated him as a "sailor robber" and a "skipper lick," while others, in drunken confidences, pointed him out to awed passengers as the "biggest crimp on the coast."

His refusal to drink some of the arsenicated alcohols which the gang proffered him caused them to pass loud-voiced comments upon his general make-up and that of his ancestors for a hundred years back.

Though Slick Jimmy was annoyed, he found solace in the thought that the crowd were bound for the River Plate with Captain "Cleg" Kennedy—a "bully" skipper who could be relied upon to entertain his crew warmly on the passage to the southward.

"Yes," he murmured as he watched the dungaree and "dog's wool" clad shellbacks who sprawled lazily over the steamer's forehatch, "they will git all that's comin' to them, th' sassy flatfeet. They won't have so much jaw an' guff when they git Cap Kennedy a-fannin' their thick skulls with a belayin' pin. He'll set 'em up good an' taut afore they sight the English Bank Lightship!"

While he was musing upon the gullibility of seafaring men in general, a hard-bitten rascal with one ear detached himself from the lounging mob and lurched over in his direction.

"Say!" he growled thickly. "Wot d'yer say th' name o' that bark was we've signed in? Y'know we ain't agoin' ter be bulldozed inter shippin' on some bloody nigger-drivin' Bluenose by any — sailor-snatcher that thinks we're a crowd of easy mugs. Now tell us again; wot d'yer say her name was?"

When Haynes had opened the articles, he was very particular not to let the crew know the name of the ship. He had reasons, good reasons, and when interrogated by One Ear, he smiled cynically and replied diplomatically:

"Why, my bully, I said her name was th' *Stella Polaris*—got that? *Stella Polaris* is her name an' British is her nation."

The sailor gave a drunken nod.

"Humph!" he grunted. "— funny name for a limejuicer. Sounds ter me like a Dagoman. *St'lar P'laris!* I never h'ard o' her afore. Who's skipper?"

Slapping the man upon the back, Haynes answered breezily:

"Cap'n Cleghorn—as fine a man as ever trod a ship's deck. Youse fellers'll have a reg'lar picnic with him. He's as easy with crews as a baby. Arternoon watch below; no nigger-drivin' an' lots o' grub. Ye'll never wanten leave her, an' when ye git back ye'll be thankin' me for shippin' ye inter sich a snug, easy berth. Yes, sree! Ye'll have th' time o' yer life on that bark!"

And with an enigmatical smile, the shipping-master turned away.



ARRIVING in Anchorville, he corralled his charges, and shouldering their bags they lurched down the gangplank and on to the wharf, singing maudlin chanteys.

"Follow me, bullies," cried Haynes, "an' I'll soon put ye aboard o' yer ocean palace."

Leading the way down to the boat landing, he hailed a large motor-launch and ordered the sailors to pile in. The *Pole Star*, loaded to her to'gallan trail with a million feet of deals, rode to her anchor out in the Bay, and the sight of her caused the one-eared sailor to stiffen involuntarily.

"Slick" Jimmy noticed the man's hesitation and with forced heartiness bade him tumble into the launch. The man still riveted his drunken gaze on the bark; a light of comprehension seemed to dawn on his face, and he turned on the shipping-master with a snarl.

"Wot d'yer say that craft's name was?" he growled pointing to the bark.

"Th' *Stella Polaris*, my bully," answered Haynes with evident perturbation. "Tumble in m'lad, an' don't keep th' la'nch waitin'."

With another glance at the *Stella Polaris*, the sailor swung around on the shipping-master with an oath. "Ye're a liar!" he roared. "Blast me! that's th' *Pole Star*—a Novey Scoshey hell-ship, an' well I know her an' her bully skipper! Didn't I jest sling my hook from her in th' Boca v'yege afore last—from her an' her bully skipper? That's yer *St'lar P'laris* is it? Well, smell my fist, yuh swivel-eyed land-shark!"

With a terrific punch, One Ear smashed Haynes under the jaw and toppled him over the cap log into the dock, and with another glance at the bark, grabbed his bag and hoofed it up the wharf. In the excitement that followed, another man in the launch who had learned the name of the vessel quickly grabbed his dunnage and followed suit, while Haynes was being hauled, sputtering and cursing, out of the water.

Fortunately for the shipping-master, the others were too drunk to comprehend what had happened, and when Haynes rolled over the launch's rail, he yelled to the boatman to shove off and get out to the vessel as quickly as possible.

A few minutes later, a leathery-faced mate at the bark's starboard gangway tallied the thirteen nondescripts as they lurched aboard, while the saturnine, heavy-

browed Captain Kennedy listened to the shipping-master's oath-besprinkled account of the desertion of two members of his foremast gang.

"Waal, Mister Haynes," drawled the skipper when the aggrieved one finished his narration, "it's up to you to git them back or git a couple more hands by night. I've waited for a crew long enough and I mean to git out with the tide to-morrow morning or know the reason why. Git them back or git two others. I've paid you for them, so git them back or you and I will fall out!"

II



YOUNG HARRY WINSLOW, skipper of the Anchorville fishing-schooner *Isabel Winslow*, had just run in from the Cape Shore and La Have with a fare of ninety thousand "shack." Unloading his catch, he had fresh ice under hatches and fresh grub in the booby hatch ready for the return trip. Jack Henderson and Wally Burke, members of the *Winslow's* crew, had spent a hard day in the hold pitching fish and stowing ice, and when the day's work was over they donned their shore toggery and decided to spend a quiet but happy evening ashore. Both had drawn their shares, and with a matter of fifty dollars apiece in their jeans they were feeling positively plutocratic.

"We'll jest drop inter th' picture show, Wally," said Henderson, "then we'll have a couple o' drinks with the boys up to Morrison's an' maybe a rack or two o' pool. We'll be gittin' out in th' mornin', skipper says, so as long as we git aboard by twelve we'll git a four-hour snooze afore we h'ist th' mains'l."

Struggling with his collar, Burke nodded a dumb assent, and a few minutes later the two fishermen, smartly dressed in the latest cut suits, tan shoes and derbies, sallied ashore in search of a quiet evening's enjoyment.

The work in the hold had been hard, and the salt fish they had for supper had engendered a thirst, so the two dorymates could hardly be censured for fetching up and making their first berth at Jack's Saloon.

"It cert'nly beats th' — what a thirst a man c'n raise on salt herrin'!" remarked Henderson as he tossed off a stiff caulker

of whisky. "It shore does give a man a pow'ful thirst. I cal'late I'll have another, Wally."

Burke's sentiments were in accord, and together they absorbed some five thirst-quenchers when Skipper Winslow swung in.

"Hullo, fellers!" he greeted them. "I was jest lookin' for you. See'n don't git full up, boys. I'm goin' out with th' tide to-morrow mornin' at four an' ef you don't turn up, I won't wait."

"Come an' have one, Harry," cried Henderson, but Winslow declined with a laugh.

"Can't do it, boys," he said. "I'm a married man now, an' I've got to take the wife to the moving-pictures to-night. See'n git aboard early, fellers."

And the young skipper nodded to the loungers present and passed into the street.

"He's a great lad is Winslow," remarked Burke gravely. "As fine a skipper as ever swung a wheel, but ye don't want ter git him riled. He's th' devil an' all whin he's mad. Let's have another drink afore we go to th' show."

After a supper of salt herring, it was particularly unfortunate that a moving-picture film depicting the agonies of a prospector dying of thirst in Death Valley should have been thrown on the screen. The very sight of such a scene tended to fill Henderson's mouth with imaginary grit, while Burke declared with emphasis that he was expectorating cotton wool.

The agonies of the prospector were undergone in reality by the two fishermen, and when the hero of the picture play rode off to the rescue with a huge water-skin and a long-necked bottle in his saddle holsters, the strain was too much. Hoarsely excusing themselves, the two worthies arose at the end, and with but one thought in common, tacked back to Jack's Saloon.

Here a convivial crowd were regaled by Henderson's recital of the prospector's sufferings, and as the big fisherman acted all the writhings and squirmings in order to impress his audience, the urgent need of a thirst-quencher became intolerable and Jack was kept busy "setting 'em up."

The more Henderson drank, the more eloquent he became upon the subject. Sailors' yarns of thirst at sea were raked up until the reminiscences became positively tantalizing. Blackened lips and swollen tongues, rasping breath and gnawing stomachs sprinkled these descriptive discourses, until

the baked, dry harshness of a throat unmoistened by liquor of any sort seemed to have fallen like an epidemic upon the crowd in the bar-room.

Drink after drink poured down the two fishermen's throats until the demon seemed insatiable, and it did not take long for Henderson and Burke to attain the condition known to sailormen as being "in the sun."

 IT IS not definitely known whether the proprietor of the saloon was in league with the film company, but when he overhauled his cash at midnight he had to admit that it was the best night's work he had done for many a day. In the rush of business he had managed to dispense a good gallon or more of the alcoholic stimulant which is brewed out of fusel-oil and other brain-bnumbing ingredients in quiet woodland spots, and which the revenue officers never test for proof.

This "squirrel" whisky is handed out to drinkers whose discrimination, by reason of their libations, has weakened, and it has a tendency to make the absorber talk "nutty" and evince a desire to climb trees. When Burke and Henderson insisted on carrying away a bottle of this particular brand, the bartender made a mental note of the work the town policeman would have in a few hours with two drunken fishermen.

Arm in arm the two worthies staggered down the wharves to their vessel.

"Le's have a song, Wally, m'son," hicquipped Henderson. "Here goes!

Thar's a vessel alayin' down to Yankee Harbor,
An' for me she's waitin' thar',
An' I mus' go aboard of me bark,
For th' winds they do blow fair——

"—— it, I've broke th' long-neck, an' th' juice is all over me glad rags!"

Henderson stopped and sat down on a near-by pile of lumber, while Burke picked the pieces of broken glass out of his pocket and endeavored to brush his dorymate down.

It so happened that "Slick" Jimmy Haynes was coming down the wharf after a fruitless search around town for the missing men, and, hearing Henderson's singing, hurried to investigate. As he stepped up to the carousers, he muttered,

"Here's my meat!"

"Hullo, boys!" he greeted them. "What's th' row, bullies?"

"I had a durn long-neck o' rum in me pocket," answered Henderson, "an' th' blame thing's broke an' gone."

"Never mind, ol' pal," said Haynes whipping a flask out of his coat.

"Have one on me. It's th' real Mackay."

By the time the flask had gone the rounds, all three were friends for life.

"That's better than yer saloon bug-juice, eh?" remarked Haynes. "But, say, boys," he added, "come out to my vessel an' I'll give ye a drink o' stuff that ye'd leave yer happy home for. Come along!"

Nothing loath, Burke and Henderson took the shipping-master's arm, and tumbling into a dory tied to the wharf, Haynes laid to the oars and pulled them out to the *Pole Star*. Rounding up to the Jacob's-ladder, the three climbed aboard and entered the bark's cabin.

Captain Kennedy was seated at the saloon table overhauling his papers and on the noisy entrance of the shipping-master and his companions, he arose and stared with a questioning eye at Haynes. "Two friends o' mine," said "Slick" Jimmy with a wink. "We've bin havin' a bit of a drink together. Th' saloons are all closed ashore, but maybe ye kin give us a drink aboard here. Me an' my friends hev a powerful thirst."

The skipper knew that Haynes had something in the wind, and going into his room he produced a bottle and four glasses.

"Who th' —— are these fellows?" he inquired softly as he passed the shipping-master.

"Your two foremast hands," hissed the other. "I couldn't find th' guys that skippered, so I've lifted these boobes. Leave them t' me. I'll fix it shipshape an' proper."

Drawing the cork, the wily Haynes filled the glasses, but before passing them over, he looked at Burke and Henderson, who were swaying, vacuous-eyed and flushed, by the table.

"Boys," he said, "it's after twelve o'clock an' th' skipper here darsen't sarve a drink without we all sign a paper. For the Custom-h'se officer, y' know, boys."

Henderson nodded gravely.

"All ri'," he mumbled. "We'll sign zhee paper. Git her out—hic—we wantsh th' drink, ol' feller."

Producing pens, ink and a formidable legal-looking document, Haynes gabbled:

"This is to certify that we opened a bot-

tle of whisky aboard this ship for medical purposes only, and sign herewith according to law, *ad valorem* and *pro bono publico*."

After this rigmarole, all four signed their names. Henderson glanced hazily at the sheet.

"You got a hang of a—*hic*—lot of names thar', ol' man. I cal'late you mus' ha' sarved a good many drinks."

With a breezy laugh, Haynes swept the document away.

"Now, boys," he said with the heartiness of a man who has landed a pair of suckers, "drink hearty an' give th' ship a good name. Here's how!"

When the two fishermen, overcome by the liquor they had consumed, dropped in a drunken stupor upon the cabin lockers, the shipping-master mopped his forehead and looked across at the skipper.

"*Ad valorem, pro bono publico*," he repeated with a chuckle. "Oh, it was too easy. Signin' th' ship's articles for a few drinks! Shove th' scum for'ard when ye like, Cap'en, an' don't wake 'em up too soon. They're fishermen an' ef they sh'd come on deck while ye're inside th' Heads there 'ud be th' devil to pay an' no pitch hot. Good-by, Cap'en, an' a pleasant voyage to you!"

III



SKIPPER WINSLOW was angry. Two of his best men, Burke and Henderson, had failed to turn up, and as the young skipper paced the quarter of his vessel, he anathematized the missing fishermen in language which would have caused their hair to curl had they heard it. It was early morning; the others of the crew were aboard and overhauling their gear or casting the stops off the sails, and Winslow cast an eye every now and again up the wharf.

"Darn them!" he growled. "Why don't they come? I've a good mind ter leave them ashore, but I'll wait an hour longer."

An hour went by, during which time the crew of the schooner were highly edified by the stentorian shouts and curses which came from the direction of the bark *Pole Star* just towing out.

"There goes a hot packet," remarked old Jimmy Thomas. "I cal'late her crowd'll have a session afore they arrive down in Bunoz Ayres. They say Old Man Kennedy

niver kept the same crew a single voyage. He knocks 'em about so much that they skip out as soon as she makes a port an' he saves their wages. Listen to th' yells of her bucko mates, fellers!"

The bark passed within a hundred feet of the fishing vessel and upon her foc'sle-head the mate was busily engaged in "straightening out" some of the hands who had become recalcitrant. The able way in which he laid them out with a capstan-bar caused the fishermen to emit sundry grunts of disapproval, and Winslow himself knocked off cursing the missing Burke and Henderson to watch the bark's mate getting his crew in line.

Captain Kennedy's thunderous voice could be heard ordering the yards to be peaked and the listening fishermen were much impressed by his Olympian air. As the lumber-laden windjammer passed out of sight in the early morning haze, Winslow called to Jimmy Thomas:

"Jimmy," he said, "I don't like leavin' these two jokers, though I feel like kickin' seventy-seven different kinds of blazes outer them, but I have a guess that they're full up with rum somewheres. They were in Jack's Saloon last night an' were pretty well lit then. Let's go ashore an' have a look for them. We've missed this tide, I cal'late, but I'll swing out in the afternoon whether they turn up or not."

Walking ashore, Winslow and Thomas made for the saloon and questioned the bartender.

"Have I seen Burke an' Henderson?" The dispenser of drinks wiped the bar down and made a bluff at recollection. "Let me see—yes, they were here last night up till closing time. Were they drunk? Oh, no! I don't stand for that in this bar. They were pretty well on, I'll admit, but they weren't what ye'd call 'pickled.' Henderson was givin' th' boys a great yarn about some movin' picture he'd seen at the show. 'Dyin' o' thirst' I think he called it——"

"That's enough for me," interrupted Winslow. "I saw that picture and I know how Henderson was feelin' when he talked that way. I cal'late he was as full as a tick when he left here an' what Henderson does Burke'll do. Jimmy, you go up to their boarding-house, an' I'll take a run down to the lock-up."

A search in both places failed to reveal any traces of the missing men. The pool-

rooms, the tonsorial parlors, the saloons and fishermen's rendezvous denied having seen them, and after questioning everybody they met on the main street, both the skipper and Thomas began to fear that the two dorymates had fallen over the wharf.

The news soon flew around the town that Burke and Henderson were missing, and it was not long before the whole population were discussing the advisability of dragging the harbor, while the temperance and local option advocates grew eloquent upon the necessity of driving the "cursed drink" from the fair fame of Anchorville.

 AT NOON, the old night-watchman at the lumber-wharf crawled out of his bed, and, when he heard the intelligence, he scurried off to look for Skipper Winslow.

"Rackon I might be able tew tell yew whar' yore two men are, skipper," he said when he located Winslow.

"Give us yer story, Uncle Ned," replied Winslow, "an' ef it's good I'll give ye th' price of a drink."

The old watchman nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I was in my office at th' wharf last night when yore two men went along drunker'n a fiddler's cat. They had th' shippin'-master feller from Bayport along with them, an' I sees them git inter a dory an' pull 'cross th' harbor somewheres. I don't know whar' they went, but I rackon yew kin git th' feller that was with them ef yew skin along to th' Bay steamer wharf. He brought th' *Pole Star's* crew over yestiddy an' he'll most likely be agoin' back to-day."

Hastily flicking the watchman a quarter for his information, Winslow ran down to the steamer wharf, closely followed by half the *Isabel Winslow's* crew. "Slick" Jimmy was stopped just as he was preparing to step aboard the steamer, and taking the fat cigar out of his mouth, he gazed in consternation at the red-faced crowd of fishermen who surrounded him.

"Excuse me, mister," said Winslow, "but I want some information about two of my crew. The watchman at Morrell's wharf said that you an' them pulled across the harbor in a dory last night. Where are they now?"

With a look of well-simulated surprise on his face, the shipping-master replied:

"Me pulled across th' harbor with two of your men? An' what in thunder sh'd I be doin' with two fishermen across th' harbor last night?"

"Well, I don't know," answered the young skipper, "but you're th' guinny they were with, so give us th' true bill."

"You're mistaken, my man," replied Haynes. "I don't hang around with yer gurry-stinkin' friends."

Winslow's young face showed a perceptible hardening of its lines and the old familiar look of determination lurked in eyes and mouth. Gripping the shipping-master's arm, he spoke with a harsh ring in his voice.

"Come now—no bluff! I know who you are, Mister Slick Haynes. You're th' man that fly-flapped Tom Watson inter shippin' on th' barkentine *Annie Higgins* last Fall an' sent him down to Demerara on th' tub. I cal'late ye've bin tryin' some o' yer monkey games on with Jack Henderson an' Wally Burke. Out with it! Where are they?"

Haynes wriggled in the skipper's grip and protested his ignorance of the whole affair. Realizing that he was in dangerous hands, he cried to the officers of the Bayport steamer for assistance, but those gentlemen seemed to be absorbed in their own affairs and turned a deaf ear to his entreaties. They were all Anchorville men, anyway, and had little love for the shipping-master.

"Come on now!" rasped Winslow savagely, gripping the flabby arm of "Slick" Jimmy in a grasp which made him wince. "What hev ye done with them? I can't stand here all day. Ef ye don't give me a true bill of last night's doin's, I swear by th' Great Trawl Hook that I'll give ye in charge for murderin' my two men! Ye'll come along with me now to Judge Curwen an' tell yer story there."

This possibility had not struck the shipping-master. It would be decidedly awkward for him if he had to explain things before a magistrate, so realizing that a partly true confession would be the best way out of the difficulty, he cast a glance at the gangway and said:

"Waal, now, I'll tell ye. Two men, by the name ye mention, stopped me last night an' asked me ef I'd sign them on in a vessel, so I took them out to a craft an' they signed the articles——"

"You shanghaied them, yuh swab!"

roared Winslow. "What vessel was it?"

The steamer whistled; her sailors commenced hauling the gangplanks aboard, and Haynes wriggled in Winslow's grasp.

"Let me go!" he yelled. "I've got ter take that boat!"

"What vessel was it?" insisted the young skipper.

"Th' *Pole Star*——"

"What?" thundered Winslow. "Well, you're a pretty swab!"

And twisting Haynes around he planted a terrific kick on his stern quarter which sent him sprawling into the mud of the wharf. Cuffed and kicked by the angry fishermen, the unfortunate shipping-master was rescued by the steamer's men and hauled aboard, bruised and torn.

"—— you!" he roared, when a safe distance intervened between the steamer and the wharf. "I'd like ter put th' whole scurvy lot o' youse aboard th' *Pole Star*! Anyhow, yer gurry-lickin' pals'll have th' time o' their lives——"

And cursing the fishermen upon the wharf, Jimmy Haynes the "slick" passed from the sight of Anchorville.

IV



THE towboat had been tied up to her wharf again in Anchorville by the time Burke and Henderson gained partial possession of their faculties in the bark's foc'sle. The vessel was rolling steadily to the sharp chop of the Bay and this motion, more than anything else, caused Henderson to recover his wits. It wasn't the quick, jerky roll and pitch peculiar to a fishing-schooner at sea, whereby a man has to cultivate limpet-like qualities in order to remain in his bunk, but the motion was slow and gradual—a logy careening and lethargic rising and falling which betokened a long, heavily laden vessel under sail.

While Henderson lay in his bunk collecting his scattered thoughts from the chaos of a brain befuddled with too much alcohol, he listened in stupid wonder to the discordant shouts of the crew laying their weight on a halliard or brace, and the sharp strident tones of an officer as he bullied his watch. Something must have happened aloft, for a voice sang out in answer to a hail.

"Ay, sir! Upper foretops'l brace pendant carried away!" Then came a period

of silence, until a harsh voice thundered from aft. "Hands to th' main-brace! Sweat her in! Get a pull on them lower maintops'l sheets—th' clues are a fathom away from th' sheaves! Trim your rags, Mister Mate, a —— sight better than this!"

Henderson understood, and it did not take him long to enlighten the befuddled Burke as to what had happened.

"We're shanghaied, Wally!" he said. "We're on a blasted square-rigger! Rouse yourself, for th' Lord's sake, an' we'll see what we kin do!"

Burke sobered up marvelously.

"On a square-rigger?" he yelled. "Holy Saint Patrick! let's get outer this!"

Stepping outside the foc'sle they caught a glimpse of the Nor-west Shoal Lightship on the quarter and the hills of Anchorville in the blue distance far astern. A fresh breeze was blowing, and the bark, with topgallants'ls set, was sliding along over a sunlit sea with a roll to leeward which buried her scuppers when she felt the puffs in the canvas aloft. On the windward side of the deal-laden deck, the crew were working, while pacing the quarter-deck—monarch of all he surveyed—was Captain Cleghorn Kennedy.

With aching heads and sick stomachs the two fishermen followed the course adopted by all shanghaied persons and lurched aft to have it out with the skipper. The latter gentleman, smoking a cigar, received them at the break of the poop with eyes that glittered ominously and a face which was cast-iron in its lineaments.

"Waal!" he said in a voice like the grate of a file. "What d'ye want? Put ye ashore, I suppose?"

"Ay!" grunted Henderson with a surly growl. "Ye've hit it right away. We've bin shanghaied aboard o' this vessel, Cap'en, an' I cal'late we don't want'er stay."

"Ye don't, eh?" rasped the skipper with a sarcastic smile. "Waal, we'll see about that. You'll go ashore in Buenos Ayres, I reckon, but not before. So, slide away out o' this an' turn to, or I'll help ye!"

"Hold fast, thar', ol' man!" cried the fisherman unabashed. "Ye can't come that talk over us. We're Anchorville fishermen belongin' to an Anchorville vessel, an' as far as I kin recollect, we were brought aboard here while under th' influence o' liquor. Ye can't detain us with any bull-

dozin', so cut it out! You try an' keep us aboard here an' you'll be sorry in more ways than one, an' I'll lay a dollar ye'd never need show yer face in Anchorville again!"

Captain Kennedy listened with an ever increasing scowl on his saturnine visage, and finally threw his cigar away with an impatient gesture. Buttoning up his coat, he squared his great shoulders and prepared himself for the effort of booting the two complainants off the poop. A thought seemed to deter him, however, and he altered his belligerent attitude for the nonce.

"See here, you men," he growled, "step below a minute." And leading the way down into the cabin, he produced the ship's articles. "Now, you scum," he snarled, holding out the papers, "afore ye go any further with yer jaw, I'll show you some-thin'. D'ye see those names—Wallace Burke an' James Henderson—signed on here as substitute able seamen before me an' shippin'-master Haynes last night? That's where ye stand——"

"But we never signed no articles," protested Henderson, while Burke scratched his head in an effort to comprehend what it was all about.

"Your fr'en got me'n Burke ter sign a paper for a few drinks last night, but we cert'nly——"

"That'll do now!" roared the skipper menacingly. "None o' yer slack lip! Th' both o' ye signed th' articles legally. There's bin no infraction o' th' law, so get away t' —— outer this or I'll show ye th' way!"

 THE quick-witted Henderson sized up matters at a glance. The Captain meant to hold them whether they liked it or not. Well, they wouldn't give in without a struggle. Henderson and Burke were no poor devils of deep-water sailors with the spirits beaten out of them by the iron hand of nautical authority, and Captain Kennedy, bully, hazer and all as he was, inspired no fear in the hearts of the hardy trawl-haulers. They failed to cloak the aggressive master mariner with the awe and respect due to an autocrat of blue water. Giving Burke a nudge, Henderson put himself on the defensive.

"Oh," he jeered, "you're agoin' ter try some o' yer square-rig shines are you? Waal, ye kin come ahead an' try! Lineup,

Wally, ol' son, an' we'll make hay in this timber droghin' peddler's cabin an' show him what's what!"

And before the furious skipper could put up his hands the fisherman smashed him between the eyes with a crack that made him see star sights till further orders.

"Holy Sailor!" he roared. "I'll fix you for that, you —— swab!"

And the three men mixed it up in a battle royal. Crash! The china on the cabin table went flying in all directions. Down came the flower-pot rack under the skylight, and the South American parrot added his shrieks to the general pandemonium. Pummeled by the enraged fishermen, Captain Kennedy bawled for the mates, and in a moment the two of them came flying down into the cabin. With a wild Irish yell, Burke went for the second mate, who came at him like a West India hurricane, and the fisherman stopped him in his tracks with a spring like a wildcat, and both men went to the floor.

Henderson was in hand grips with the mate, while the skipper was recovering his breath, and for a few minutes the *Pole Star's* cabin rivaled a gang battle in a Bowery dance-hall. Cursing horribly, the skipper grabbed a heavy glass water-bottle from the swinging tray and hove it with all his strength at poor Burke, who was trying to gouge the second mate's eyes out. The missile caught the fisherman a glancing blow on the head and dropped him, limp and gasping, over the body of his opponent.

Noting the success of his long-distance work with the water-bottle, the skipper made a fly at Henderson with a heavy pewter dish, but unfortunately it caught the mate at the base of his skull and caused him to relax his grip on Henderson's throat, and the latter deftly grabbed the revolver from the mate's hand as he fell. With a hoarse shout, the fisherman backed into a corner and promptly stuck the skipper and the mates up against the bulkhead with hands clawing for an imaginary overhead support.

"I've got ye!" panted Henderson. "Move an inch, an' I'll plug ye deader'n herrin'-bait, consarn ye!"

Burke, looking very sick, staggered to his feet and stood stupidly looking on until his comrade spoke.

"Come on, Wally, ol' son, let's clear out o' this!" And covering the three men with

the gun, the fishermen darted out on the main deck through the lower door.

"What'll we do?" cried Burke, as they ran past the wondering seamen gathered around the break of the poop.

"I cal'late we'd better git up aloft somewheres for a spell till I git a chanst ter think. We may be able ter hail some fish-in' vessel or a dory as we git down th' Bay."

Scrambling up the weather fore rigging, they reached the foretop as Captain Kennedy and the mate emerged from the cabin.

"Man, but that was a beautiful scrap, Wally!" said Henderson when they had gained the top. "Gee! but I landed that bully skipper a proper snifter on his jib, though that mate nearly had me. I got his gun, anyway."

Burke said nothing, but rubbed a lump on the back of his head and ruminated.

The skipper and mate appeared on the deck below them.

"Come down out o' that!" thundered Kennedy.

"Go 'way, you naughty man!" jeered Henderson, poking the revolver in the skipper's direction. "Any guy that wants a bullet in his gizzard kin git it by tryin' ter come up here. Run away! ye make me sick!" After saying something to the mate about "starve 'em out," the skipper made his way aft again, and for the rest of the day they were not molested.

When evening came, the pangs of hunger and thirst were beginning to tell upon the two mutineers, but Henderson had a plan.

"Wally," he said to his companion in misfortune, "got a bit o' line on ye?"

"Naw!" grunted the other.

"Waal, git out yer knife an' cut the sarv'ing on the eye o' that stay thar'. Unlay it an' git me a bit o' line 'bout forty feet."

Laying over the edge of the top, Henderson hailed some of the crew seated below.

"Hey, bullies!" he called softly, "send us up some grub an' water. Here's a line ter make it fast to."

One of the men nodded sympathetically and entered the foc'sle. They had no love for the afterguard, and winked and smiled in admiration at the two worthies aloft.

In a few minutes, a piece of canvas containing some ship's biscuit and a hunk of salt beef was bent to the line and hauled up, as well as a can of water from the fore-deck scuttle-butt. After a hearty meal and a

smoke, Henderson and Burke settled themselves for an all-night vigil on the top.

V

WINSLOW wasted no time. As soon as he heard of the whereabouts of his two men, he made up his mind quickly and with characteristic determination.

"Back to the vessel, fellers!" he cried. "We'll see what we can do!"

Never in all the annals of Anchorville seamanship did a vessel get under way so quickly as the *Isabel Winslow*. The men piled aboard and worked with feverish energy, while the original Isabel Winslow, as pretty as a picture, leaned on the arm of Mr. Dickey and watched her husband getting his vessel ready for sea.

"Be careful, Harry," she cried half fearfully. "Don't get drowned while going after those men. It's blowing hard outside."

Harry turned around with a laugh.

"No fear o' that, sweetheart," he cried. "We've a splendid craft here."

Strong arms were hauling upon the main-sail halyards and the big sail climbed the mast in record time.

"High enough th' throat! Haul away on yer peak!" cried the skipper. "High enough yer peak! Throat jig, now, fellers!" Amidst the shouts of the men, Winslow's voice could be heard calmly directing operations, and his wife felt strangely proud of her manly young husband. "Give her th' jumbo! Stand by to haul on yer foresail!" Willing hands cast off the shore lines, and with Winslow to the wheel, the men fairly flew around decks to his commands. "Up on th' foresail, boys! Hands aft to th' main sheet! Trim her down! Steady as ye go!"

Waving good-by to his wife, Winslow swung the wheel over, and under her three lowers, the beautiful 120-ton semi-knock-about schooner glided into the Bay with a hundred eyes watching her. The jib was soon hauled up, and, careening to the breeze, the beautiful vessel forged for the open waters of the Bay of Fundy.

It was blowing a moderate gale outside, and when Winslow had tested the strength of the breeze, he passed the word for the flying kites.

"It's goin' ter be wet, fellers," he said,

"but we've got t' overhaul that bark in jig time. Jes' fancy what a time poor Henderson an' Burke'll be havin' with them mates. Give her th' balloon an' stays'l, boys, an' watch her go!"

Oh, you lovers of salt water, a rip-roaring breeze and an able vessel! Could you have been on the *Isabel Winslow* then, your hearts would have been full of ecstasy and the glory of the sea. The sea! With a day of sunshine and clouds, and a breeze which sped the long combers like race-horses, and caused their emerald tops to burst in crests of snowy foam! Whiffs of refreshing ozone flew athwart the wind with the lick of the brine-laden spray which sparkled in miniature rainbows and swept over the gallant vessel in steam-like clouds and kept the decks sluicing with water.

With canvas hard as iron, full with the wind and rounded in alabaster curves, the beautiful schooner curtsied to the Fundy rollers and sheared through them like a plow through soft loam. Up on the dizzy heights of the foremast-head a man hung to the topmast stays and swung athwart the blue of the sky as he searched the horizon ahead for the object of their chase; while astride the wheel-box Winslow steered automatically, and with deft turns of the spokes coaxed the vessel along her trail. Easing up a little when the puffs caused the big stays'l to strain at the sheet, the young skipper kept her with the lee rail in a deluge of white water, while the lower deadeyes of the lee rigging remained invisible in the hissing froth.



EVENING came and the sun went down in a blaze of glory, and through the star-bestrewn darkness the schooner tore along, while, oilskin-clad, the men lounged around decks and cabin ready for a call to handle sail. As he steered, Winslow had memories of his weary vigil in the old *Valfrefya* when he raced for a wife and risked the lives of himself and the men who were with him now—ay, and the two rascals aboard the bark somewhere ahead.

When he thought of them, somehow he jammed the wheel down a spoke and sent the gallant craft with a wild lurch to starboard which hove the men off the port lockers. Well, they had stood by him when he was a green skipper trying to pick up a crew, and he would do the same for them

in their trouble. It was the freemasonry of the fishing fleets, where a call to "stand by" is never refused, and where men have hearts as big as their bodies, and hide under a rough exterior the sterling qualities of the bravest and best.

It was just breaking daylight, when Jimmy Thomas from the foremast-head gave the hail.

"Bark dead ahead!"

"How far off?" cried Winslow.

"'Bout six or eight miles, I cal'late!" came the answer, and the skipper steered with brows corrugated in thought. "How am I agoin' t' git them two mugs?" he inquired of Thomas when that worthy came down.

"Run her alongside, an' th' hull gang ov us'll board th' win'jammer! We'll darn soon git th' boys back!"

Winslow smiled and shook his head.

"We darsn't do that. We'd git inter no end o' trouble ef we tried that stunt. I cal'late I'd better go aboard th' bark an' have a palaver with her skipper——"

"Aye! an' have him boot ye over th' side!" interrupted Bill Jackson. "I know th' joker, an' a bigger bully never stepped a win'jammer's quarter. He'll never give yer men up, an' ef we were t' try Jimmy's scheme we'd git plugged by th' guns o' his bucko mates."

"Well, anyway," replied Winslow, "we'll run alongside to loo'ard an' see what th' two dubs aboard'll do. Maybe when they see us they'll jump an' swim for us."

"Huh!" laughed Thomas, "neither o' them kin swim a stroke. Ye'll hev ter think out somethin' better nor that. I reckon my scheme is th' best. We'll risk th' law an' their guns. The devil himself wouldn't stop me from boardin' her!"

Within an hour the big bark was broad on the weather bow, and Winslow edged in under her lee. The breeze still held and was strong enough to careen the big windjammer down to lee scuppers awash, and her lumber-piled deck was fully visible to the watchers on the schooner. As they hauled in closer, it was evident that there was something doing aboard the bark.

Two disheveled figures were laying out on the bark's foretop and seemingly holding an animated conversation with a mob on the deck below. An officer paced the quarter-deck, while at the windward rail Captain Kennedy and his chief officer were

doing some tall swearing at the figures aloft.

"What's th' racket aboard thar?" queried Winslow. "Is that our beauties up at th' foremost-head thar?"

"It is, by th' Lord Harry!" cried Thomas excitedly. "Thar's Henderson with a pistol in his mitt and Burke jest alongside him! I kin spot th' black-whiskered mug o' Cleg Kennedy at th' wind'ard rail. King Dogfish! ye kin hear them cursin' from here. Out with th' dories, skipper, an' we'll board him!"

Winslow hauled in until the sails of the schooner began to shiver in the bark's lee, and Henderson on the foretop yelled:

"Oh, Harry! Stand by!"

Both craft forged along, side by side—the fishermen watching the scene on the bark with puzzled eyes and wondering what they were going to do. Henderson and Burke were evidently masters of the situation for the present, but it would only be a temporary advantage at the best, and the combined attack of the bark's officers would compel them to submit at some time or other. So Winslow reasoned, and relinquishing the wheel to Jimmy Thomas, he hailed the bark.

"Henderson! Tell th' skipper I want ter have a talk with him!"

The other heard and made a negative gesture with the gun.

"It ain't no use, Harry! He says he'll keep us here till Blazes freezes over, an' he's some mad, I kin tell ye! Me 'n Burke mauled him pretty bad yestiddy an' he ain't got over it yet. He's bin cussin' aroun' somethin' sinful jest now, an' he can't git th' crew ter bring us down!"

As the fisherman bawled this intelligence at the top of his pipes, Captain Kennedy heard and it spurred him to action. Leaving the deck, he ran down into his cabin and in a few minutes emerged with an old-fashioned muzzle-loading shotgun.

"Look out!" yelled the watching fishermen, "th' skipper's got a gun!"

Henderson nodded, and while Captain Kennedy ascended the main rigging to windward, the *Winslow's* crew fathomed his intention and warned their comrades on the bark.

"He's climbin' inter th' maintop ter pot ye!" they roared. "Hoof it to th' deck an' jump. We'll pick ye up!"

The master of the bark quickly gained the top, and while Burke and Henderson

were clambering down the lee fore-rigging, he opened fire. Luckily for them, the *Pole Star* gave a lurch at the time and the shot went wide, but it hastened their descent considerably.

With a howl of deep-water oaths, the fishermen on the schooner ran to the dories, while Winslow roared.

"Over with th' dories, boys! Board her, by Godfrey, an' git these men!"

As soon as he spoke, Number One dory rose from the nest and splashed into the sea with her crew vaulting the rail into her!

Henderson and Burke had reached the top of the deck-load, and as the mates made a rush for them, they each lifted a loose twelve-foot plank and leaped into the sea. Up into the wind went the *Isabel Winslow* with canvas thundering and banging, while dory after dory went up on the tackles and outboard. With crews yelling and shouting and tumbling pell-mell into them, eight boats went driving for the men hanging to the planks, and in a brace of shakes they were hauled aboard, dripping and chilled, but none the worse.



IN THE meantime, the *Pole Star* was brought to the wind with her maintopsail aback, and a clumsy effort was being made by her crew to launch the lee quarter-boat. By the time it was swung out, the runaways were climbing over the *Isabel Winslow's* rail, and the dories were being nested again by a crowd of excited, panting fishermen who laughed and jeered at the quarter-boat which was pulling toward them. Captain Kennedy was in the stern-sheets and shouted to Winslow to hold on a minute.

"All right," cried the young fishing skipper as the furious windjammer master swung alongside. "What d'ye want?"

"I want those men!" bawled Kennedy. "They're on my articles and I've paid for them. I mean t' have them!"

"Oh, ye do?" replied Winslow sarcastically. "Well, sir, you jest come aboard an' take them. Ye have my permission an' I won't stop ye. Maybe ef ye ask them politely they'll go back with ye, but I cal'late they won't. Come ahead an' take them, Cap'en!"

"Ay!" roared twenty shackers, divesting themselves of their oilskin coats, "jest come over th' rail, Cap, an' take 'em with you! They'll go easy, won't ye, boys?"

Smiling calmly, Henderson and Burke flourished ugly looking bait-knives and lollied on the rail.

"Jest come aboard, ol' hairy face," said Henderson facetiously, "an' I'll take a lot o' pleasure in cuttin' ye up for trawl bait! We're an easy crowd aboard here, an' I'm sure none o' th' boys 'ud lay a hand on yer sanctified hide. Oh, no! by th' time we got through with ye, th' dogfish 'ud be sniffin' at yer corpse! Ef I say th' word th' hull crowd o' us 'ull board yer blasted timber drogher an' take yer whole crew away from ye! Run back, ol' blow-me-tight! That hairy mūg o' yours gives me a pain in th' side!"

The *Pole Star's* skipper glanced along the line of determined faces aboard the schooner, while the boat's crew secretly enjoyed the situation, until, with a bitter oath, the skipper snarled:

"Lay to yer oars, — ye!"

As he swung away, he shook his fist at the late members of his crew, who shouted after him,

"Never shanghai a fisherman, Cap! They ain't a healthy crowd t' handle!"

And amid hoots and jeers from the delighted trawl-haulers he pulled aboard his ship. They watched him climb aboard, and after the main-yard was swung the bark lurched off on her course to the southward.

Winslow had remained as an interested spectator of the affair, and when the bark drew away he swung the wheel over.

"All right, fellers, ye've had yer fun," he cried to the laughing groups gathered around the two heroes, "now I'll have my little say. Get away for'ard with ye, an' let Henderson an' Burke step up here for a minute."

With the exultant smile fading from their features, the two adventurers slouched up to their skipper. Now that the excitement was over, they looked pictures of misery as, wet, haggard and bruised, they stood before Winslow. Their good clothes were ruined; Burke's tie had distributed its colors liberally over his white shirt, and the

collars of both were missing. Burke sported a black eye which rivaled his tie in hue, and Henderson's nose was swollen to twice its normal size.

There was a steely look in the young skipper's eyes as he glanced over them, though a close observer would have noticed an almost imperceptible twitch at the corners of his determined mouth.

"What hev ye got t' say for yerselves?" he asked quietly.

"Nawthin', skipper," replied Henderson dejectedly, while Burke added apologetically. "It was th' movin'-pictures that done it!"

"Humph!" growled Winslow as he twirled the wheel a spoke. "Ye know what I do with men that get drunk an' can't be relied upon? Ye know what I sh'd ha' done with ye, eh? No? Well, I sh'd ha' let ye go down to Bweenose Ayres in that bark, an' maybe it would ha' learnt ye a fine lesson. As it is, I hev no use for men aboard my vessel that git full up th' night afore sailin' an' keep me hangin' aroun' for them. I won't have any booze-fighters in my gang. Ef I git them, I'll fire 'em when I strike port."

"Oh, don't do that, Harry!" wailed Burke, while Henderson maintained a shamefaced silence. "S'help me, I'll niver take another drink again as long as I live — except at New Year's, Saint Patrick's Day, an' th' 'lections."

"Same here!" echoed Henderson.

Winslow turned his head to hide a smile and the two defaulters sensed it.

"Away for'ard with you, an' git a change an' a mug-up!" growled the skipper finally. "Ef I ever git any more of these monkey-shines from you jokers again——"

"There'll be no 'again,'" interrupted Burke.

"All right, for'ard you go now an' send Jackson to th' wheel here."

As the two fishermen staggered to the forecabin, Winslow laughed silently.

"They're a great pair o' boys," he muttered. "Jest like kids, but movin'-picture shows ain't good for them!"



The



Confession

by
George
Dyre
Eldridge

JIMMY, "the Oyster," was lying in St. Barnabas, with a hole, bored by a pistol ball, through the small of his back.

"It's a mighty small hole for a man to crawl out of," he said to Father O'Drea; "but it's the door to Purgatory, sure."

And Father O'Drea found it in his conscience to answer, "Tut, tut, Jimmie! Ye'll live to cut up scandalous at me wake," and almost cheated himself into believing that Jimmy didn't see the tear that gathered in his eye and rolled down his rosy cheek before he could catch it under pretense of smothering a sneeze.

Then came Daniels, assistant district attorney, intent to coax or flatter or frighten Jimmie into speaking a name, and morally certain of failure. Within three weeks three men had been shot in the self-same manner, and Jimmie was the only one who had lived till help came.

"You know who shot ye," said Daniels, with too just a measure of the quickness of the man he had to deal with to try finesse.

"Sure."

"And ye want him sent up for it."

"It's not meself who's forgivin' him yet."

"Of course you aren't. You want him to have his medicine, and the district attorney's office is ready to help you."

"Glory, ye say! It's mighty foine o' ye to say it. It's not many a good turn I've done 'em."

"No; but this'll be one. Give me the name, and we'll see that he gets his dose, full measure."

"It's meself'll get even wid the spalpeen, thankin' ye kindly," answered Jimmie.

"But you aren't going to get out o' this!" exclaimed Daniels brutally. "He's done you up. If you don't help us he'll go scot free."

"It's meself'll wait, sure. Plaze God, I'll mate him as he's goin' down," and with a feeble hand he pointed downward.

As he grew weaker, he held that as his last word, and not even Father O'Drea, than whom no priest ever had a more questionable flock, or dealt with it more wisely, could get him to speak another.

"Sure, Faither, ye shouldn't coax a dyin' man to seek revenge," the wily one argued.

"But he ought to be punished for the safety of the community."

"Faith, an' the community's never bothered about me safety. Let it take care of itself and be — to it, savin' yer Riverence's presence."

"Tut, tut, Jimmie! It's God's service to punish the man."

"Then God'll do it, an' yer Riverence needn't bother about it at all, at all. If He wants it well done, He'll send him to Purgatory while I'm thar."



HE WAS weaker the next day, and his eye burned with a feverish light. He had caught a word that morning.

Mike McCreary had been put on trial for the Dolan murder and as the day wore on Jimmie had before him the picture of Mike battling for life with judge, jury and the district attorney's office for odds against him. That night he confided his fears to Father O'Drea.

"They've it in fur him, Faither," he moaned. "He voted the precinct agin Big Bill an' the man he was afther for alderman; an' sure I knew then they'd get him!"

"Nonsense!" answered the priest. "He killed Dolan, an' ye know it. Do you want all the scallawags to get off?"

"It's mostly the scallawags, Faither, who's ben kind to me," moaned Jimmie. "T'others ha' ben too busy to bother."

"But 'twas a dirty trick o' Mike's," urged the other. "If he'd got to get Dolan, why didn't he do it in a fair fight? Answer me that, man Jimmie!"

"Whist, Faither. When I was a little lad, an' me mither so poor she didn't buy us clothes fur fear we'd eat 'em, an' didn't buy us grub 'cause she didn't have the money, I saw a loaf o' bread one night be'ind a winder, an' somehow just then the winder got broke, an' then I was runnin', like Paddy McGlyn wid the Devil behind him, an' I was a huggin' that loaf o' bread as if 'twas a gurl wid rid hair an' blue eyes, an' *plump!* I run into Mike, fur he was the cop thin, an' a foine one he was, begorra."

"Whar'd ye get that?" he ses.

"I picked it up," ses I.

"In the street?" ses he.

"In the street," ses I.

"Then, begorra," ses he, "ye'd better get home, an' you an' yer mither an' the kids tuck it away, fur I see the baker comin', an' it's some tall lyin' I'll have to do, or it's the Island where ye'll find the nixt bit o' bread!"

"An' he lied fur me like a Christian, Faither. Do ye think he's the man w'd shtick the likes o' Dolan wid a knife? Faith, I b'lieve Dolan was lyin' himself and was never shtuck at all, at all."

"Sure, Dolan was dead when they found him. If he hadn't been, he wouldn't a' ben the fool you are an' kept his mouth shut."

"Faith, the skunk did it himself."

"And what did he do with the knife? Will ye tell me that?"

"Whist, Faither; will they hang him?"

"Mike? They will."

"Sure, did the docther say how long I'd last?"

The question came so suddenly and so took the priest off his guard that he had no time to cover his tracks, and before he could find himself he had given away the fact that the lad could not hope for more than forty-eight hours.

"Sure, then it's time I got the load off me soul. 'Twas meself that killed Dolan, an' ye can tell the judge so whinever ye want to."

Father O'Drea looked at the lad for a moment, and then shook his head.

"It's lyin' ye are, Jimmie, me lad; and you that near death."

The lad gave him back his glance, with eyes in which fear, almost terror, lurked. Once, twice he tried to speak, and it was not till the priest had given him a drink that he whispered:

"It's the truth, Faither, I tell ye; an' I'll have the murder of Mike on me soul too if ye don't help me! I crep' up be'ind Dolan an' I drove the knife between his ribs, an' down he wint, wid a groan, an'—an' that was all."

The priest gazed down on the boy, and doubt grew in his face. That he was laboring under some terrible excitement—fear, hope, remorse, possibly—he was certain; and yet he doubted.

"What did you kill him for?" he asked.

"Sure, yer Riverence knows how he treated me sister Mary?"

Too well the good father knew, and he felt that here indeed was a motive that accounted for the crime as fully as that which the district attorney's office had patched up to tighten the net about Mike McCreary. What if the lad was telling the truth, and he, by his obstinate unbelief, was helping to hang the other for the crime of which he was innocent?

"What did ye do with the knife?" he asked suddenly.

The lad's face lightened.

"I'll tell the judge and the cops when they come," he said; "I'll tell 'em where they'll find it."

The priest knew that the search for the weapon had been high and low, and that if indeed the lad could tell the hiding-place it would go far to prove the confession true. He stooped over the couch.

"Jimmie, me lad," he said solemnly, "it's the deadly sin ye're committing if ye're lying and ye so near death. If ye're lying, tell me!"

"Sure, it's the truth I'm tellin'."

"Do ye swear it on the blessed cross?"

The lad's face grew ghastly. Terror filled his eyes, and horror looked out from them. But this was for a moment only. As the good priest shuddered at his own hardness of heart in putting the lad to such a test, the other looked up, an almost beautiful smile broke over his face and he whispered:

"I swear it on the blessed cross!"



IT WAS almost noonday when the officers of the law returned to St. Barnabas and brought the knife with which Dolan had been killed. They had found it where Jimmie told them to look, and the physicians who had examined the wound left no doubt in any mind that it was the veritable weapon with which the deed was done. But Father O'Drea sat at the cot side and motioned the officers away.

"Ye're through," he said. "It's my turn now. The few minutes that are left belong to Holy Church."

"But the court has ordered the jury to hear his statement," said the assistant district attorney. "If you want McCreary freed——"

The tired eyes opened and the boy whispered:

"I am ready."

Father O'Drea turned to the surgeon in charge with a question he found no need to ask.

"Yes," said the surgeon, "but tell them

to come quick and have it over. He's got more strength than nine out of ten men would have, but it can't last forever."



AS THE afternoon closed in the lad lay in a half stupor, merely opening his eyes at times and casting an appealing glance at Father O'Drea. Each time the priest shook his head and answered, "Not yet." Then in turn he would stoop and urge the dying lad to his last duty as a Christian, and each time the boy would in turn shake his head and repeat the words, "Not yet."

"Oh, Jimmie, me boy," pleaded the Father, "don't take the chance, don't wait too long——"

"Not yet," sighed Jimmie, and the eyes closed again.

At last came a messenger, and with his first step the lad's eyes opened and an eager look came into his face.

"The court has directed the jury to bring in a verdict of 'Not guilty,' and has discharged McCreary."

"Is he free?" whispered Jimmie.

"Yes; free."

"Can they touch him again?"

"Never; not even if they found out absolutely that he had done it."

"Faither, I'm ready," said Jimmie, and the few fleeting moments of the lad's life belonged to the priest and Holy Church.

As Father O'Drea left St. Barnabas, where he had closed the eyes of the dead lad, he found before the door a big man, half crouching and shaking as with a chill. He seized the priest by the arm.

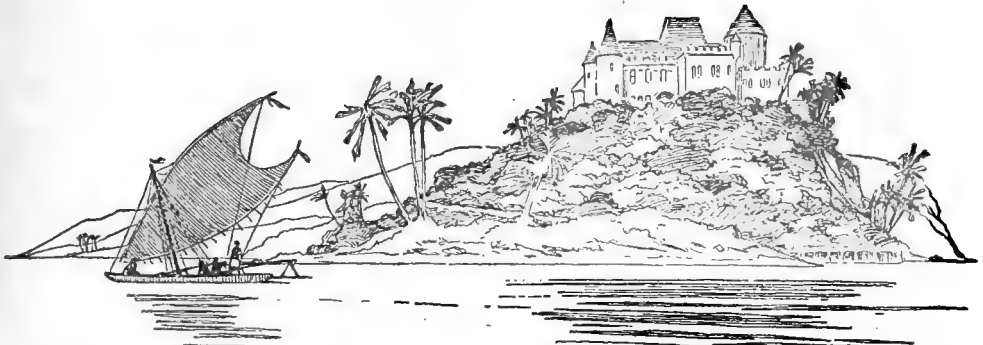
"Is he——?" he could not speak the word.

"Yes, Mike, he's dead."

"Did he——"

"What he told me was under seal of the confessional, and no man will ever know; but Mike, if ye ever take a crooked step again in your whole life, and there's a curse the Church can find that'll send ye to Hell, and keep ye there through all eternity, ye may be sure I'll find it, or me name isn't Shemus O'Drea, as was given me in Holy Baptism!"





The Island of the Beloved

by William
Tillinghast
Eldridge

CHAPTER I

ON THE CLIFF ROAD

THE man lay a huddled heap in the dust.

Gordon dropped to his knees and turned the body over. With a start he struck a match, for his hand had come away damp and sticky.

The flame flared up and the American drew back in horrified, dumfounded silence—the Marquis de Roquesford lay before him!

Gordon knew him instantly, for all the distorted face, for since his arrival upon the Island of the Beloved he had seen the Frenchman often, save during the past three months while De Roquesford had been absent on a long trip.

That he had returned was self-evident. That he lay dead with a knife planted squarely in his heart was only too plain.

A quiver touched Gordon's flesh, and he raised his head sharply and with that alertness which an animal might, scenting danger.

Personal fear was not a part of his make-up, and yet there was something ghastly and terrible to him in this murder upon the lonely road; the whispering breeze in the palms overhead seemed to moan of the horror in the scene.

Were the stories he had been told true

after all? His time, since reaching the Island, had been pretty well filled with the work he had in hand and yet he had heard strange tales. Had he stumbled upon one of the incidents which the natives liked to recount? Feud, jealousy, personal spite—in the end murder!

The Island over which the half bedridden old Count d'Artois ruled was not, then, the tropical paradise that it seemed.

The pleasure he had found in studying its strange history, its heterogeneous population, the old chateau on the hill, was to be dimmed by the thought that this foul murder was but the like of many that had gone before.

Ere this he had been wont to smile at what he considered the wild exaggerations with which he, a stranger, was being favored. He had even depreciated the stories told him by Sam Hunter, the American missionary, although he was prone to admit—from what he had seen of Hunter and also from Miss Grey's assurance—that Hunter was the last man in the world to weave fairy-tales.

He thought of Hunter now, even wished he were at hand. The stocky red-headed minister—the "fighting parson" as he was known—would indeed be the one to turn to in such a moment. Gordon felt the want of a companion without feeling the first element of fear.

He wondered whether his incredulity had

needed such an incident as this to drive the scoffer into the background and make him consider the Island of the Beloved other than as an enthusiast.

He looked down upon the white, distorted face at his feet, and his square jaws set hard. It was something terrible to find a person he had known, spoken with, seen alive and active, lying dead at his feet—murdered!

It roused his anger, his love of fair play. Why hadn't the Marquis been given a chance? Why hadn't he, himself, moved more quickly when he heard?—and suddenly he remembered what he had heard—a woman's shriek!



HE WAS on his feet now. With muscles set, every fiber aquiver, he stood there in the middle of the dark road, his body bent slightly forward.

With panoramic swiftness he relived those few hurried moments—from the time he had stepped aside to allow the carriage to pass until he had recognized the man who lay dead at his feet. He had heard the shriek, a woman's voice, and had dashed toward the carriage which, in halting soon after passing him, had caused him to stop short.

There had been angry voices, the scuffling of feet, the deep breath of men exerting their full strength, and then he had brought up short to see those men, a blurred mass, by the carriage door.

He had sprung forward, collided with a reeling figure, and gone down into the dust with a body upon his chest. It had all happened in a moment—so suddenly that, coupled to the fall, he had felt his bewilderment as he flung aside the man sprawling across him and struggled to his feet.

Then that cry had come again. A black blur swung for the driver's seat, the plunging horses sprang ahead, and reeling and rocking, the carriage had been lost in the darkness of the road.

He had started in pursuit, but stopped, realizing the folly. Then dropping to his knees he had recognized De Roquesford and risen to his feet.

Now, as then, there was wafted to his nostrils the fine road dust, the heavier damp, pungent odors of the tropical forest which hemmed in the cliff road until it looked like a black tunnel leading to oblivion.

A groan from straight ahead sent Gordon forward as if his body had been released by a spring. His eyes fell upon a black sprawling spot in the roadway.

He cleared the few feet and halted dead short. It was not a woman, as his beating heart had told him, but a man.

Dropping to his knees again, Gordon struck a second match. It flared and went out. Before him lay a fellow countryman—the cut of the man's clothes, everything about him, bespoke his nationality in a glance.

That he was a stranger to him Gordon saw, even as his eyes noted the red streak of blood across the forehead and a deep sigh escaped the white, set lips.

Quickly he lifted the man's head and drew his handkerchief across the red streak. The act disclosed an ugly cut upon the temple.

Almost roughly, Gordon shook the fellow and called upon him to speak. If he had some liquor, something to give him!

It was useless to call for help—that he knew only too well. His eyes lifted to gaze into the darkness again. Up the road, two miles beyond, was the Count's château. That De Roquesford lay dead behind him made Gordon certain D'Artois' residence must have been the destination of the carriage.

Back of him lay the village, half a mile or more. He would turn back. Hunter's place in its little garden must be his goal.

Stirring himself to action, he strove to lift the senseless man to his feet. He raised him with his arms about his waist and the fellow crumpled up against Gordon's shoulder, his feet going out from under him like loose props.

"My foot, God, my foot!" moaned the man.

For the first time Gordon noted the man's feet. The right one hung twisted about, and a glance showed where the heavy carriage had passed over it, shattering the ankle bone.

"Celia! Celia—I—er—I——" and the words trailed off in a groan of agony.

Gordon dropped to his knees, slipped his arms about the limp body, and straightened. The man was close to his own weight and a heavy burden.

But there was no thought of that, save only with the idea that he must help the living and let the dead wait; the American

turned and went staggering down the road toward the little village by the booming ocean.

CHAPTER II

RECOLLECTIONS

A MAN'S brain is a queer storehouse. Thoughts that are least expected turn up at odd moments.

As Gordon went stumbling down the road with his overheavy burden, his mind was less occupied with the question of whom he might be bearing to safety—or of the one who had called for help—than of the Island itself.

He had learned a bit of its history before he left San Francisco. Enough, at least, to whet a curiosity which had grown to real interest as he came to know Count d'Artois and his friends.

The boom of the ocean, the night wind in the palms, seemed tuned to the thoughts that raced through his brain—to speak of the Island and whisper the story of its people.

A sea-girt land, the home of blacks, Indians, a few traders—so sang the sighing wind. That was as the island had been years before. Then had come the first of the D'Artois, the Frenchman who had deserted his King and country when Louis XVI was forced to bend his ear to the deep-throated accusations of the clamoring mob.

For ten years the Frenchman had been a wanderer. Finally he had come upon a land where he deigned to settle, a spot from which he hoped to carry out the dreams he had been weaving in his years of exile.

That land he named *l'Île du bien-aimé*. Through the strength of his personality he had made it his own, even to the blacks and Indians who had called it theirs until his coming.

That the Island profited, rather than suffered, by the Frenchman's seizure was self-evident. It had been nothing before he came—a spot of land upon mariners' charts, little more. The Frenchman with his dreams had made it known, at least to a portion of humanity which looks for reward without much work.

Upon the Island's reefs the first D'Artois had discovered pearl fisheries and a fortune. With the wealth thus gained he planned to pay his gentlemanly adventur-

ers, whom he collected about him to the end of helping him seize an empire for himself either in South America or along the southern coast of the northern continent.

Such a scheme had been the companion of his waking moments, the dream of his nights. That he had the courage and strength to lay plans for such an undertaking proved the stuff of which the D'Artois were made.

Gordon had often pictured that first ruler of the Island. He was doing so now as he plodded on along the dark road. A man like his grandson, the present Count: tall, thin, white of hair and beetle-browed. Yet the first D'Artois must have had more strength of character, or possibly the scheming and plotting that filled his life, together with his brave hope, cast about him a glamour which made him appear of more courage and greater resourcefulness than the present Count.

At least his plans were real, his dreams more than most dreams; Gordon had the assurance of his grandson for that. It also seemed that the theft of his fortune and his murder—by some of those pleasant gentlemanly adventurers whom he had collected to aid him—alone prevented his attempting a fulfilment of his desires.

His death left the Island and the dream of empire to his son. One offered an estate, the other a thing to conjure with and talk upon up there in the huge rooms of the château where the Count's friends gathered to partake of his lavish hospitality.

And there were many who did so gather. Some came while the first Count was alive, came when Louis XVI lost his hopes and head. Others came later, from odd corners of the earth and for reasons that no man asked, lest, perhaps, he find the question turned upon himself.



SO THE Island changed. The natives intermarried, a few rough sea travelers found the reef-bound harbor a good anchorage, and some the land worthy of cultivation. Still the D'Artois ruled—for none, in number, questioned the family's right; those who did singly—their fate made up the substance of many tales Gordon had been told.

In those tales it was said the son still held to his father's dream, but failed to bring about its realization, not because he was murdered at seventy, but rather because

the sea failed to give forth a second fortune equal to the demands such an undertaking would place upon it.

With wealth only sufficient to live upon, with the world moving onward and making the seizure of land next to impossible, the dream died.

Yet it was often mentioned, as one would perhaps speak of some cherished friend.

Gordon had heard of the revenge the sons had meted out to those thought guilty of their father's murder. He had heard, too, of how men disliked by the D'Artois had disappeared or been found dead in bed; it was said the southern hillside grew an herb that brewed a deadly poison.

Thus it was hardly strange that the incidents of the night recalled this old history. Nor strange that his thoughts should turn from such recollections to his own coming to the Island.

The American was an architect. When Stephen Grey made his fortune and decided upon a château on the hills above San Francisco, Gordon, son of an old friend, was appealed to to carry out the idea.

That he wanted the work did not prevent Gordon from expressing his opinion. His artistic sense rebelled; he declared châteaux were for the old world, not the new.

When, however, the Greys convinced him that they were determined to carry out the idea he told them that the only thing to do was to accept some old château as a model, copy it line for line, stone for stone, and build where they would.

The sound logic in the suggestion appealed to Stephen Grey's practical mind and he forthwith told Gordon of the Island of the Beloved and the château built by the first D'Artois and added to, with tower and wing, by son and grandson. Grey knew a great deal about the Island and recounted much of its history, over cigars, in San Francisco before Gordon set out.

Elsa Grey, Stephen Grey's niece, had taken the long trip to Honolulu in company with her maid, and then by the little bi-monthly traders' steamer to the Island. Grey and his wife had later run down in their yacht, and so it came about that the millionaire could give Gordon first-hand information concerning the building he wished copied.

Gordon undertook the task gladly. He had a love for odd corners of the world, and that Elsa Grey was still on the Island,

stopping with her old school friend Marjory Hunter, gave promise of congenial company.

Gordon was certainly not disappointed in the latter. Hunter he liked the instant he got him by the hand. His wife was delightful in her simplicity and repose of manner, while Elsa Grey, whom he met for perhaps the third time, was unspeakably interesting in her bubbling enthusiasm and startling vitality.

Besides, Gordon found the old Count and his friends no end of a pleasing study. As he sketched the château inside and out, or spent days with tape and rule, they were often at his elbow. D'Artois in a wheel chair—when his gout was bad; Max von Brunt, his friend and physician—political exile it was hinted—gruff but delightful, strolling up and down and smoking outrageously; the Marquis de Roquesford, a tall studied Frenchman who was forever dancing attendance upon D'Artois. Besides these three there were others: the Count's grandson, Guy D'Estes; Madame Lavaille, and, when a ship came in, the officers.

One of this company was gone!



THE truth beat in upon Gordon's brain like a dull pain. It seemed that he had liked De Roquesford the best of the three. D'Artois, in his old-fashioned dress of knee-breeches and flowing coat, which intensified his thinness, was often petulant, always eccentric. Von Brunt a trifle too short of speech, and cutting; you could seldom be sure of the man or his meaning. De Roquesford had been a gentleman if nothing else. He was of the old school, a courtier of polish.

For the first time since starting for the village, Gordon smiled. He realized suddenly that his thoughts had, in a way, brought him to the point of feeling that he was one of the Island's people, a part and parcel of its history, close to its owner; even to the point of thinking that upon his hands rested the task of seeing that De Roquesford's murderer paid for his act.

D'Artois, Doctor von Brunt! They would look to the matter when they learned what had befallen their companion, the third of the strange triumvirate.

A groan from the man who lay in his arms brought Gordon back to the present with a start. He shifted his burden and stepped ahead briskly. Under the weight

of the body, and his thoughts, his steps had lagged.

Von Brunt was needed to attend the man who still lived, the Count must be informed—and then again Gordon seemed to hear that shriek which had rung out with such horrible shrillness as the carriage halted.

A woman was in peril!

He began to run and so covered the road to a turn and break in the palms where he halted, spent in breath. Below him lay the village. Low-roofed huts and cottages stretched a blurred whole before his eyes. Out into the reef-bound harbor ran a black wharf. It looked ugly and scarred in the dim light of a waning moon.

He caught the light in Hunter's cottage and swung toward a path across the hillside, a shorter cut than going about by the road and through the village.

He crossed a narrow gully, raised his eyes and stopped short. His glance had caught the blurred outline of three men—one after the other—who went skulking across the field toward the very house which was his destination.

His breath escaped between his set lips suddenly. What had the incident upon the hill road done to him? Did he scent danger in every shadow?

But why didn't men walk upright and in the open if they were bound for the missionary's? He thought of Hunter, of his wife, and of Elsa Grey!

He stepped ahead, was about to break into a run, when a man rose suddenly in his path, making him a sign to halt.

CHAPTER III

AT THE PARSONAGE

THE Reverend Samuel Hunter sat with feet in chair, his flannels rather rumpled, and his red hair—of a carrot hue—a startlingly vivid contrast to his white negligee shirt.

Upon his lips was a decidedly pleased expression—he had in his hand a magazine only four months old, and at his elbow was a pile nearly a foot high. There had been letters in on the steamer that had docked unexpectedly at the edge of dusk, and those had been read eagerly by the minister, his wife and Elsa Grey. The charm in hearing from the world never grew less.

The Reverend Sam smiled and glanced across the room, strikingly cool in its simplicity of furniture and the dainty draperies that hung at window and door. From the next room came the last notes of a dreamy waltz, and then he heard Elsa Grey's low humming cease as she swung about on the piano-stool and, rising, passed out through the open French windows to the shelled terrace.

Hunter laid down his magazine, and his eyes gazed retrospectively upon the darkness without.

"Dreaming," nodded the minister, glancing up quickly as his wife stepped into the room. "Elsa has just gone into the garden."

Mrs. Hunter's lips parted in a smile. Her even, almost perfect features marked a face unusually pale. It was when she smiled that one caught a swift hint of the sweetness of her character, for in the change of her expression there radiated a wonderful restfulness.

Her fingers caressed her husband's hand as she passed toward the terrace to join Elsa. She halted in the open windows when a sudden exclamation came from the garden. The next instant Elsa Grey swept swiftly to Marjory Hunter's side.

"There is some one in the garden; three men!" she whispered.

Hunter was on his feet on the instant. Elsa Grey's voice always rang with a charm which never failed to claim attention. It was strong and full, the voice of youth. It whispered of vitality, a woman's vitality filled with a sweeping energy and fascination.

Now there was a new note, one of suppressed excitement, but not alarm, and in her big brown eyes and flushed face Hunter read a message.

"They were hiding. I stumbled upon one, and when he dashed away two others followed."

"Blacks?" asked Hunter.

Elsa shook her head with a positiveness that left no question of doubt.

With a sign for the two girls to step inside the house, Hunter turned toward the garden. He glanced back once.

Elsa Grey stood tall and slender in the open French window, leaning forward with tense eagerness. Her Titian hair played lightly about her face. Her lips were set, her bosom rose slowly, and in her cheeks

there appeared a faint flush of excitement.

Her gown of filmy texture draped her full and supple figure in clinging folds. She looked the embodiment of active, pulsing youth, the possessor of an overwhelming amount of energy; but no more than a match for her radiant health and restless, never-tiring vitality.

Marjory Hunter stood by her side. She was a little the shorter, and her light golden hair was drawn in tight strands about a face more beautiful in its regularity of features than her friend's, but far less strong and resourceful. In its paleness the vivid coloring that made Elsa Grey's face so startlingly attractive was lacking.

Hunter went slowly into the garden, active and alert.

He knew the natives possessed a tremendous amount of curiosity, a deal of suspicion and superstition, and that on several occasions he had found some overbold black peering in upon his family circle at night. He also knew that Elsa Grey was not a girl to show unwarranted alarm and that, even had she stumbled upon three natives unexpectedly, she would never have turned back to the house.



HE EMERGED from a walk lined with low palms and stopped. A figure was coming through a break in the hedge. Hunter stepped back and waited. His brow was knit, for, as dark as it was, he saw that the man was apparently carrying something huge and bulky in his arms. Then the minister made out the dangling legs and stepped forth.

"Gordon," came the low voice of the American.

Hunter went swiftly out of the shadows.

"Who is he, what has happened?" he demanded, lifting the man's wrist to catch the pulse.

In few words Gordon sketched the happenings on the cliff road.

Hunter listened with startled horror as they moved toward the house.

"De Roquesford dead, murdered!" he whispered. "He must have come on that boat. I was not down when it came in."

"Nor I," agreed Gordon. "But he came on it, of course, and this chap with him."

"And a woman," added Hunter, leading the way in by the back door and down a long corridor toward the bedrooms, which were upon the first floor.

As Gordon laid the injured man down, Hunter bent over him with a glass of liquor. Spoonful after spoonful he forced between the lips and then the two men straightened.

"I'll get away," suggested Gordon in a hushed voice. "The Count must be told, and some one should go up for De Roquesford's body. Von Brunt should see this man."

"I'll go with you. Marjory can stay with him," with a nod toward the bed.

Gordon frowned. "Had you better?" he questioned.

"Why?" Hunter turned upon him.

Gordon's eyes lifted from the white-faced American.

"I saw three men go sneaking across the field and a fellow stopped me at the bottom of the hill path."

"Elsa flushed three men in the garden. Who were they?"

"I don't know; I saw them at a distance. The man who stopped me kept in the shadow and his hat was well down over his eyes. He said he was watching the three, and didn't want them scared off from going ahead and showing what they were about. He was frank enough, and still I don't think I quite believed him. When I declined to halt, offering him—" with a nod toward the bed—"as my reason for hurrying on, he did a queer thing; he pulled his hat down lower, stepped closer to me, and shot a sharp look into his face. Then he wheeled and without a word leaped the bank toward the road. If I hadn't had my hands full I'd have had him back for an explanation."

Hunter nodded.

"I'll stay here; you go," he said.

Gordon swung quickly toward the door as Hunter leaned over the bed and began to apply cold bandages to the cut temple.

The senseless man—about Gordon's own age or possibly a few years younger, certainly not over thirty—moaned softly. There was a touch of youthfulness about his face, a certain good-looking, manly beauty, save that the mouth and close-cropped mustache carried in the lines a hint of weakness.

Suddenly he moved.

"De Roquesford," came the whisper.

Gordon halted on the threshold.

"De Roquesford, you understand," came the low words. "Celia, there—there is no question about it. You—you, the Marquis—the Marquis will tell you about it. Celia, it—it—is true. You—you are Count d'Ar-

tois' granddaughter," and as suddenly as the man had spoken he lapsed into silence, leaving the two listeners as tense and rigid as if the words had charged the atmosphere with electricity.

CHAPTER IV

D'ARTOIS GETS THE NEWS

GORDON closed the door into the hall and stepped swiftly to Hunter's side. "What does he mean? D'Artois' granddaughter!"

Hunter raised his head with a sharp lift of the chin. He had not moved so much as a muscle as the injured American spoke.

"Count D'Artois had two daughters," he said.

"I knew that he had had one; Guy D'Estes was her son."

"There were two. The older married D'Estes—a beach-comber or little better—and they were driven from the Island. How D'Artois raved! At least so they say, and when she came back, deserted, ready to die, her father still would have nothing to do with her."

"And yet he took her son; he seems fond of him, too."

Gordon spoke slowly as his eyes continued to study the white face upon the pillow, as if he might read an answer to the new puzzles crowding in upon his brain.

"Yes, he seems fond of Guy D'Estes," nodded Hunter, dropping his chin and gazing dreamily at the face below him.

"I wonder that D'Estes accepts. He doesn't seem that kind."

Gordon spoke absently, his thoughts were wandering.

Hunter looked up. "Don't you think Guy D'Estes would forgive any one anything, if he thought it was to his advantage? Well, I do," without waiting for an answer to his question. "D'Estes is a cold-blooded fiend, Jack. His morals are the very lowest."

Gordon was startled at the vehemence in the tone. The sharpness of the words brought him back to the present with a start.

"But he's likable," he protested, meeting Hunter's flashing eyes.

"And therein lies his greatest danger. You know him for a scoundrel and like him. I even allow him to come here. Allow

him," with a smile and gesture,—“why shouldn't I? If I can by such a course engender one little germ of decency in his soul, it is my place to do so; I am glad to.”

Gordon moved uneasily.

"What of the other daughter?"

"She eloped also. A steamer put in here one day. As customary, the Count had the officers at the château. The younger daughter left when the ship did. I've heard she married the second officer, an American by the name of Haverstraw. More than that, I know nothing. The old Count never saw her again, although De Roquesford told me once that she had written her father. I have a vague idea her husband died in a very short time and she was in America, destitute."

"And of course that old Frenchman wouldn't forgive her," growled Gordon.

Hunter passed his hand across his chin. "If this man's ravings are true, it looks as if he had forgiven her daughter. Doesn't it appear, Jack, as if De Roquesford's trip were explained?"

Gordon started. "You mean De Roquesford went to bring back the granddaughter?"

"Apparently brought her back," corrected Hunter.

"Then why was he killed? The girl! Hunter, the granddaughter, then, has been carried off!"

"When D'Artois dies who will get his property?" demanded Hunter, a sign of anger in his voice.

"Why—er—Guy D'Estes. That is—if— if Madame Lavaille doesn't marry the Count before he dies," faltered Gordon, a little bewildered at the changing questions.

"Madame Lavaille," sighed Hunter as if these pictures of his parishioners, if so the Island's inhabitants as a whole could be called, awoke troubled thoughts; "she is more dangerous than Guy D'Estes."

"She is a woman," explained Gordon.

"Of the kind who make or break history," nodded Hunter.

"Yes," gestured Gordon. "I never see her but I think that she is a personification of the class who play the part of favorites. She could mold most men to her own humor."

"And sometimes I think she molds D'Artois and again I fancy he dislikes her. Guy D'Estes told me himself that he loved her

and hated her in one and the same breath."

Gordon stepped back toward the door as Hunter turned from the bed.

"If that was the Count's granddaughter in the carriage, who wanted her on this Island?" demanded the minister.

"The Count, if he sent for her."

"Oh, to be sure, the Count and his friends, but not those who stand a chance of getting all of his property."

"Good heavens, Hunter," cried Gordon, "do you mean that Guy D'Estes or Madame Lavaille murdered De Roquesford?"

The two men eyed each other for a moment.

"I would be the last person in the world to make such a charge," Hunter said very slowly. "I was only thinking, Jack."

Gordon forced a smile.

"We are borrowing trouble. I'll be on my way; I'll speak to your wife as I go out." He stepped into the hall and looked back. "If—if this is true, D'Artois should have word quickly."



HUNTER gave a nod, and Gordon went down the hall with the feeling that he moved in a daze.

He spoke to Mrs. Hunter and turned toward the garden. On the terrace stood Elsa, her tall and graceful figure seemingly a blended part of the wan moonlight through the palms.

Gordon halted and a deep breath filled his lungs. A hush was upon the scene, a hush in which—animatedly active as he knew Elsa Grey to be—it seemed fitting she should be a part.

She turned suddenly. Her eyes, deep pools of brown, met his and she came to him with hands outstretched. On her lips he read a question even before she spoke. It was invariably so. Her face was always alive with animation, her merest glance seemed to speak.

"What is it?" she whispered. "Marjory went in, but I saw you and Sam. Who is hurt?"

He knew that she could be told, that sooner or later she would hear the story. In swift words he mentioned what had happened, being careful to spare her the horror in the thing.

"D'Artois' granddaughter!" she cried in wonder. "And oh, poor De Roquesford! Jack, it is terrible!"

"It is cruel," he said. "Perhaps the car-

riage got away. The man that swung to the seat may have been De Roquesford's driver."

Her long slender arms, snowy white in the darkness, reached out to him.

"You must be sure—you will find out and find her if she is in danger."

"I am going to the château now. D'Artois will do everything, of course. He holds these people in the hollow of his hand. It isn't possible for them to get away."

"The Count? You know him. He—he is—oh, so prone to talk and simply grow angry. That will do no good. You and Sam, can't you two do something? Younger men are needed here."

Her hand fell lightly upon his arm. The touch sent a thrill through every fiber of his body even as her words had made the blood leap in his veins.

He needed no urging, for his own anger was fully aroused, and yet her words stirred him. It was a woman's appeal for the aid of another who was in danger. It was the effect a voice will have upon a man when that voice rings with courage, hope and strength.

"I am going," he said quietly, and then his hand touched hers for just a second. "All that can be done will be done by some of us," he told her.

He went down the walk and into the darkness.

"I know," she called after him, putting out her hand to the veranda post.

She stood so, leaning forward, breathing swiftly and watching him until his huge figure was lost in the night.

Then with those words upon her lips again: "I know," she went swiftly into the house to do what she might.

Gordon went toward the village and roused a carter. As he mounted the cliff road, the slow-plodding wagon at his back, he was hearing her voice in the night breeze—

"I know."

He wondered whether she did know how her tone stirred his blood or how the touch of her fingers brought checked breath. If she knew that, had he had no desire to aid the one he had heard call for help, her pleading would have been enough.

He came to the spot where he had found De Roquesford and halted. There was the marked ground, cut and crossed by footprints, but the Frenchman's body was gone!

Swiftly Gordon searched, and when he saw it was useless he sent the carter back and faced the hill in long, nervous strides. Did it mean that the carriage *had* escaped and that D'Artois therefore had the news?



HE REACHED the level ground, crossed it and entered the gates of D'Artois' place. Suddenly the château loomed before him in dark somber lines stretching to right and left. He mounted the shelled walk, circled the pool on the lower terrace, and under a dome of star-studded sky leaped the stone steps to the paved walk about the huge building.

Why such a veritable palace should have been built on such a spot by any man or family of men was a never-ending wonder. The rooms, for the most part, were vacant, there were never enough people to fill one-quarter of them. And yet, but a week before, D'Artois had suggested that Gordon plan him a new wing, another pile of stones surrounding empty rooms that never would be used.

A figure came down the terrace, a short-set man, hunched of shoulder, with a round bald head. As he passed through the light of one of the French windows, a long pipe was to be seen hanging across his chest from which a trail of smoke floated out upon the air.

"*Achl!*" cried Von Brunt, "the builder. I'm ailing. D'Artois is crazy. He'll have no smoke in the house, he swears. Tomorrow he'll devour a box of cigars. He is a fool. I've stuck him in bed and told him so!"

It seemed plain, in the outburst against the Count—which was a most common thing upon Von Brunt's part—that no news of the tragedy upon the cliff road had reached the château. Gordon's heart sank.

"Let us go in," he said, holding his voice even, "I have something to say to you."

"To say to me! Well, I am glad you have come. I want a sane man to speak with. I thought De Roquesford might have arrived on that packet; no chance that he did and hasn't got up as yet? It is the trouble with D'Artois. His gout is bad, he couldn't go down when he had word of the boat being sighted and he wouldn't let me go nor send, he is so selfish. Pig, French pig, sir!"

They reached a huge book-lined room and paused.

"It is perhaps as well the Count is indisposed," Gordon said, speaking slowly. "De Roquesford came on that boat, Doctor."

"Came! Where the devil is he then, tell me that? What the deuce does he mean by playing D'Artois such a scurvy trick? He had some one with him D'Artois wanted to see. That's the trouble; gout be —!"

"He can't come. He tried to, and was —prevented."

The Doctor took the huge pipe out of his mouth and looked at Gordon. Perhaps he read the truth in the American's face. He stepped close:

"Out with it; I'm no babe!"

Gordon faced the short-set German doctor with lifted chin and firmly set lips. His eyes were cold gray, for he forced upon himself a sternness he little felt. Rather would he have put out his hand. The Island of the Beloved was a desolate enough place. No matter what these men had done to bring exile—rather for the very reason that they were exiles—one to the other was all they had.

"De Roquesford will never come," Gordon said in a husky voice.

Von Brunt did not move. His eyes held steady to Gordon's face, but deep down in their depths there came a hurt, heart-stabbed look.

The American held out his hand.

"Murdered," said the Doctor. "Facts! facts!" and back went the huge pipe into his mouth.



QUICKLY Gordon told of the tragedy. As he spoke, the door at his back opened unnoticed by the two. A tall, white-haired man, thin to the point of emaciation, came into the room leaning heavily upon his cane.

He tottered forward, his shaggy brows drawn upon steel-gray eyes that burned with a penetrating glitter. He looked like death afoot. His hands trembled. His right leg dragged the floor, swathed in bandages. On the rug, his shuffling steps and rubber-tipped cane made no sound.

About his body trailed a long silk dressing-gown that, open, disclosed his undergarments and the thinness of his limbs.

He walked to the center table and paused on the far side, leaning forward heavily while his chest rose and fell with rapid breaths. His gaze was set upon Gordon's

face and as the American spoke of turning the figure over and recognizing the Marquis de Roquesford, the Count straightened.

"Murdered!" he hissed in one wild shriek and pitched across the table.

Von Brunt was at his side and had his wrist in his hand as he motioned toward the decanter.

Gordon passed the liquor in a stride.

"Too much for him, the shock?" he whispered.

Von Brunt straightened, scowled, took up the wrist again, and laughed brutally.

"Too much? You know what he tells every one. His grandfather murdered at sixty, father at seventy, he at eighty. Well, he's got five years to live, if the old hag's prophecy is true."

With that, Von Brunt lifted D'Artois up and poured the liquor down his throat.

"He is not dead now," he said and dropped D'Artois into the nearest chair as if he were something loathsome.

CHAPTER V

IN THE LIBRARY

DOCTOR VON BRUNT sat with his short legs outstretched, his chin on his chest, and his long pipe, from which the smoke belched more furiously than ever, resting across his waistcoat. His stubby fingers were interlocked and crossed upon his stomach.

Gordon was in a huge carved chair behind the table across which D'Artois had fallen. His elbow rested upon the polished surface and his chin was in his hand. A frown and the hard set of his jaws made his face look almost brutal, but his position intensified his breadth of shoulders and massive strength. He was easily the most resourceful man of the three.

Count D'Artois was sitting bolt upright as if struck by lightning. His long neck, bearing his wasted but finely chiseled face, stretched forward. The heavy brows were lowered, the eyes shone with a glittering intentness and seemed the only thing alive about his rigid body.

They had been talking; now a sudden silence had fallen upon the room. The very air seemed charged with deep emotion. The brown books in the dark cases cast long heavy shadows in the corners, the furniture seemed set, hard, unsympathetic.

Gordon remembered what Elsa had said about these men, ever ready to talk—for it was all they had to do in a day—ready to plan, but not ready to move. Then he wondered whether it was strange; they had lost some one very near to them. He could not feel as they did, no matter how well he had liked De Roquesford.

He stole a glance at the Doctor; his eyes shifted to D'Artois. There had come a change over the man; he seemed even thinner, his racking foot was apparently forgotten, he looked only pathetically weak.

"Sure?" he muttered, and then he looked up. "You are sure, Monsieur Gordon, the body was gone?"

Gordon nodded.

"I thought that perhaps the carriage might have escaped and reached here."

Von Brunt's slits of eyes turned upon the Count.

"—likely!" he growled.

D'Artois seemed awakened by the speech. He swung about in his chair.

"You fool," he thundered, shaking his fist at the Doctor, "you should have had me up! I should have met that boat!"

"With your cursed appetite for strong liquor and pastry," shrugged Von Brunt, even smiling at Gordon, as if to say the man asked the impossible.

"I should have gone, I——"

"Oh, yes," grunted the Doctor, crossing one fat knee over the other, "you'd have stuck that ugly beak of yours out of the carriage and made the devils run."

"I would have," answered D'Artois, taking no note of the insulting tone. "And why not!" he shrieked. "I've made this Island what it is, I and my fathers before me. It was nothing until a D'Artois set foot upon it."

"And now it's a murder spot, ugh!" grunted von Brunt.

"Those scoundrels would have respected me," rushed on the Frenchman. "They never would have dared do such a thing if I had been there! Oh, but won't some one suffer!" and there was a gloating in the tone.

"Some one is suffering now," whispered Von Brunt.

"That is my thought," Gordon broke in hastily. "Remember I heard a woman call for help. We should be after those scoundrels. The Island is large, but still we must find them."

"My granddaughter!" wailed D'Artois, gripping the head of his cane so firmly that what little blood his fingers contained was driven out of them. "You may not know; Von Brunt does. I had sent for her; De Roquesford had a letter from a man, her cousin, from the States. He——"

"Oh, he did, did he?" interrupted Von Brunt.

"And he had gone to get her. You have the cousin, the lawyer, at Hunter's place?"

"Yes, and——" began Gordon, when D'Artois spoke up:

"Burnett's the name. De Roquesford wrote that he would come down with them."

"He needs looking after," suggested Gordon for the second time.

The Doctor sat up with a start and stuck out his round head. "I will; I'll be off, just as soon as this old fool stops shrieking and says what he is going to do."

"Do?" whispered D'Artois, shooting out his head and eying the two from under brows that all but covered the sockets; "do?" and now he smiled with malignant devilry, "I'll tear them apart!"

"Tear whom apart?" questioned Von Brunt, not at all moved to horror as was Gordon by D'Artois' fiendish grin.

"The ones——"

"Who did it? Who did it, you old Frenchman?"

D'Artois leaned across the arm of his chair and shook his cane at Von Brunt. That he had good cause to turn his anger upon the Doctor, Gordon would have agreed, much as he trusted no open break would come. It was useless to interpose, that he knew well. Still, he felt that Von Brunt might have spared a little sympathy and not vented his own heartache in the nagging of a sick man who had lost a friend and granddaughter.

D'Artois' heavy lips parted and he would have spoken had not the door at the far end of the room opened suddenly.

 THE three men looked up. Across the threshold came a tall young fellow of about thirty.

Von Brunt glared, a surprised look touched Gordon's face, D'Artois stuck his head out and puffed his cheeks.

Guy D'Estes was dressed in white riding-breeches and long black boots, a costume he invariably affected. His dark hair fell

about his broad forehead in smooth waves and under it there looked out as handsome a pair of eyes as ever sat in a man's head. They were good eyes, too, eyes that looked unflinchingly and bore in their depths a touch of candor, coupled, however, to a cynical light which gave the impression that he found much in all things to raise his humor.

His nose was straight. Under it were lips that would have been called firm but for a downward touch at the corners. His chin whispered a little of a vacillating disposition.

In figure and carriage he was noticeable. He walked with an easy swing and he carried his head with impudence. In manner he gave the impression of asking odds of no man.

He nodded to them all, smiled, and sat down on the edge of the table near to Gordon. Slowly he flicked at his boot-leg with his crop.

The Count came up in his chair; his cane lifted and held straight out, but cutting zigzags in the air, pointed at D'Estes. Before he could stop his gulping and utter the words which hung upon his lips, Von Brunt brought his huge red fist down with a bang upon the arm of his chair.

"Cain, Cain!" roared the Doctor.

D'Artois dropped his arm and swung about, facing the German.

"Fool, fool!" growled the Doctor; and then, "If Hell is paved with good intentions, Heaven must be alive with bad ones!"

The old Frenchman sank back in his chair, with open mouth, staring at Von Brunt as if the German had hypnotized him.

"Bravo!" cried D'Estes. "Good as a play. Eh, Gordon?"

"I'll brain you!" growled Von Brunt, shifting his eyes to the grandson.

"With that fat dirty pipe of yours?" laughed D'Estes.

Gordon leaned across the table and touched Guy D'Estes on the leg.

"Would you mind stepping out on the lawn?" he questioned.

The Count's grandson swung about and looked the American full in the face. For a moment his expression was a puzzle, and beyond doubt he was surprised at the suggestion from such a quarter. Then suddenly he smiled and was on his feet.

"Now, that's a civil way of putting it,"

he said, looking at Von Brunt as he spoke. "Practise your manners from this gentleman,"—the bow for Gordon was touched with insolence—"and you'll be fit to run down to the little hut in the woods, German man."

D'Estes rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and tossed the match on the rug, his eyes on Von Brunt all the time. Then he walked out on to the terrace, nodding back at them as he went.

The Doctor shook his fist at D'Estes' back. Gordon leaned forward.

"You don't mean that you think your grandson guilty, Count d'Artois?" he whispered.

He was thinking of Hunter's questions as he spoke.

"Red with blood!" growled Von Brunt.

The old Frenchman waved his thin, claw-like hand.

"I love him, love him. I turned his mother out——"

"And her mother too," growled Von Brunt.

"Be silent, I am speaking!" thundered D'Artois, suddenly taking on a new aspect.

Before the imperious note in the Frenchman's voice the Doctor shrank back into his chair.

"We must do something," urged Gordon. "Stop this talking, start a search. You, Count d'Artois, are the one to move. Man," and Gordon rose to his full six feet two, "you can not allow your feelings to get the better of you!"

"A search will avail nothing," growled Von Brunt. "Sleep, but be awake. Seem indifferent, watch, look. The snake catches the birds. Oh, be cunning!" and he began to chuckle.



GORDON shot him a sharp look. He knew Von Brunt for a queer stick, but he wondered then whether the man's reason was failing him.

"You are right," came D'Artois' even voice, with a ring that whispered of the stately customs of the court. "I am old, half bedridden. I call upon you. You, monsieur, are young, active, filled with wit and reason; I look to you. Von Brunt is not the man—he is too loose of tongue, too hot-headed, even as am I. You, monsieur"—and with a wave of his hand he appeared to place upon the American's shoulders the entire responsibility of the affair.

Gordon felt dazed. He was ready to help, but certainly he expected some information from D'Artois, some indication that the Frenchman would give him aid, in people, or his own counsel. Instead, he faced a wordy wrangle between two friends who were forever sharpening their wits upon each other, and then a wave of the hand, and the matter was put up to him. Suddenly it came to him that he wasn't wanted.

He had brought the news and D'Artois told him to go and hunt. The Frenchman would work in his own way, not caring very much for that way to be known to an American stranger.

He wondered whether he were right and, as he wondered, Von Brunt began to chuckle. The Doctor got up and planted himself in front of Gordon.

"Fine task!" he said.

Gordon turned red to the roots of his hair. He could have struck Von Brunt for his insulting look, but more for the way in which he had badgered D'Artois. He was hot, angry too, for he felt he was being treated with little respect. His help so readily accepted was not wanted.

He set his lips and Von Brunt smiled again.

"Take it," whispered the German; "you are needed. I need you. He will not move his brain." The Doctor's fat hand waved the air. "I need you." Then he wheeled about and faced the Count.

"Is that she-devil Lavaille at the bottom of this, D'Artois?" he demanded suddenly.

The Count's eyes lifted, red-rimmed circles amidst wrinkled, death-colored flesh.

"Heaven forbid, Von Brunt, that I should have as evil a mind as you," answered D'Artois, and he said it calmly, with a dignity in his tone.

For a moment the Doctor seemed to hesitate, and then his fat neck grew red and his face purple.

"Damnation!" he shrieked. "Some one killed De Roquesford, and before God I swear I'll find the one, and I'll tear—him—to—pieces!"

On the terrace, Guy D'Estes stopped dead short as the German's words reached his ears. A startled look flashed across his face, but he flicked at his ashes with indolence.

Then he walked to the window and stuck his head in just as Von Brunt moved for

the door, with his round soft hat on his bald head, for the Doctor had suddenly announced that he was off for the parsonage.

"Curiosity at low tide, grandfather," called D'Estes. "Sent out like a bad boy; I sha'n't stay," and with a wave of his hand he disappeared.

The three men looked at one another, Von Brunt halting at the hall door. To their ears was borne the sound of galloping hoofs on the shell drive.

Then there floated out upon the night air a light song which reflected no more to the credit of the singer than to the virtues of women.

CHAPTER VI

ASPASIA LAVAILLE

FROM the park below the château the road leads across the high ground and dips suddenly into a virgin forest of towering palms and rank-growing undergrowth.

It is a narrow road, but of hard bed, for the sea-shells have been beaten down until, on the darkest night, the impression given is of traveling a whitewashed path, banked and overscreened by black-green foliage.

Guy D'Estes' horse pounded along with resounding beat of hoof. The man rode easily, with a natural swing to his body, and he still sang that ribald song which had floated back to the three men in the library and brought a troubled frown to Gordon's face.

The American felt that the choice of words was an open hint that the Count's grandson cared for no woman. His sudden departure on the heels of Von Brunt's outbreak hinted at guilt. Yet Gordon could not believe the trail was so open.

When D'Estes finished his first full-throated outbreak, he selected another song and rode on, the heavy glades giving back his voice in ringing echoes. At last he drew rein and was silent. At a turn in the road he swung his mount through a narrow path and drew up in a clearing.

About him, even in the darkness, could be made out a sloping hillside under cultivation, and on the edge of the forest a low rambling house.

The call of a night-bird echoed from the rider's lips. Twice he gave the plaintive whistle. Then he swung to the ground.

The veranda of the house was cut by a line of light as the front door opened, and across the shaft came a swift figure.

The girl was short, petite, but wonderfully graceful. She fled to his side, a scarf drawn close about her olive face and raven-black hair. He had her in his arms, and his lips were upon hers as she sank contentedly into his embrace.

"*Ma chérie!*" he whispered with a low laugh. "*Ma chérie!* Zetel, I love you. With all my heart and all my breath, I love you."

Again he pressed her close to his beating heart and his lips met hers, raised eagerly, trustingly, gladly to him.

"You are late, late, my beloved!" she whispered, her arms clinging the closer. There was no reproach in the tone, the voice only told him that she had been lonely without him, that she had waited and watched for his coming.

"Of a purpose," he laughed down into her dark eyes, his own flashing with passionate fire. "I love to see you come so swiftly when I signal. It is as if your blood leaped forth to mine; as if the look in your eyes, of dark flames, said your soul cared not for saint nor sinner, but only for me."

The magnetism in his voice held her breathless. Her head sank upon his shoulder and with her arms about him, his holding her close, she gave a sigh of contentment.

He began to speak again as his fingers caressingly touched her raven hair and she listened with only a little nod now and then until he paused.

"I understand," she said as he stepped back and, holding her at arm's length, looked deeply into her eyes.

He drew her to him, kissed her again and stepped to his horse.

"I love, I love!" he chanted with a deep-throated laugh. "I love all women. In their blood is that which calls to mine, in their eyes is that which I alone can see. I love, I love—the best, Zetel!" and throwing her a kiss, he vaulted into the saddle and rode away, as he had come, singing softly now: "I love, I love, Zetel!"



THE girl watched him until the darkness swallowed him up; she listened for his voice as she turned across the hillside, until the last deep echoes were gone. Then she drew her

scarf the closer and hurried away toward the village by the ocean.

Her thoughts were of him; his—as he rode—of many things. In them Zetel played a part, for she was to find certain things that he would know.

At an arched gateway, D'Estes drew rein and rode in under a bower of fragrant vines. At the end of the drive, and before the broad veranda, he leaped to the ground.

Madame Lavaille's plantation stretched for miles toward the eastern shore, but so closely grew the shrubs and trees about the house itself that it seemed it must stand in the midst of an impenetrable forest.

D'Estes went into the broad hall without troubling to knock. He halted inside the door and his eyes searched the dim light in quick, furtive glances. Then he began to whistle and to walk toward the rear.

A door at the far end opened suddenly and out into the rays of light from an overhead lamp stepped a tall and marvelously beautiful woman. She stood still, slender, the fulness of her limbs and their perfect lines distinctly marked by the clinging folds of her gown. The dress was cut startlingly low upon the bosom and the merest band of pearl-studded silk crossed the white and even shoulders.

There was the faintest suggestion of vivid green beneath the outer folds of clinging black, and as she stepped forward one step, the gown seemed to live and pulse, to whisper in its shifting, flashing change of shade a little of how deeply the woman's passions might be stirred.

At thirty-eight, Aspasia Lavaille, who had come from none could say where, looked easily ten years younger. No lines, that might whisper of the years, touched her marvelous complexion. Her skin was white, but in the cheeks the faintest touch of color came and went. Her eyes were, if anything, too small; but the life and fire that flashed beneath the heavy shaded lashes made one forget that they were not so perfect as the red lips which parted to disclose teeth as white and even as ivory.

Her hair, done with simplicity, was of deep brown; here and there a hint of gold showed under the light.

The woman would have commanded attention in any company. Her beauty was enough, but to see her move one forgot

that beauty in the grace of her carriage, the stately, regal poise of head and body. There was strength in her face; she looked a woman who might be placed in any situation and found capable of meeting any task bestowed.

"Guy!" she whispered as she stopped.

Her voice was low, musical, like the soft night-wind on ruffled waters.

D'Estes stepped forward. His eyes were fixed upon her face and his breath came hard. He took her outstretched hands, held her at arm's length for one second and crushed her to his breast.

He uttered no word, but his lips upon hers spoke for him. She submitted to the embrace and then drew quickly back.

"It is as well that you have come; I have much to say to you."

He stepped into the room from which she had emerged and glanced about.

"Yet I came too soon," he said with a touch of jealousy in his voice. "Were you quite through with the one who was here before me?"

Madame Lavaille threw herself into a low chair, her gown draping itself in close folds about her limbs. Her long slender arm fell across the back and her head was pillowed upon its whiteness. Looking intently at D'Estes, she laughed, a low, delicious laugh that was like a caress.

"Karl," she answered him. "You are jealous of Karl!"

"Of no man," he said looking down on her. "When did I ask odds of any one?" And then, as he rolled a cigarette, "When did your overseer have new privileges?" and he motioned toward a half-burnt cigarette upon a gold ash-tray.

"Karl is more than a mere overseer," she smiled.

"And how much more?" he asked of the ashes on his brown-wrapped cigarette.

"Enough to make *mon aimé* flash fire," she whispered. "I am glad, for then I know that you love me."

"My jealousy need not be a mark of my regard. I press your lips, your arms are about me and you are gone—as smoke," and he blew rings in the air with indifference.

"She who is too willing is loved less and not for long," answered Aspasia Lavaille.

"So I have been told," he said, looking at her again. "I fear I learn my lessons badly."

 MADAME LAVAILLE straightened to light a scented cigarette.

For a moment she studied D'Estes through the smoke that wreathed her head.

"*Mon aimé*," she said slowly, "why will you do these things? Did you hate the Marquis so very, very much?"

D'Estes made no sign of having heard. His eyes never changed in regarding her closely. Then slowly he sank down into his chair and smiled.

"So," he said, "you have heard that De Roquesford is dead. You hear everything. You say that I did this?"

Her eyes, alive with life and animation, were searching his face. Her bosom rose and fell swiftly as if she labored under strong emotion.

"I do not say you hated De Roquesford. Perhaps it was not intended, and yet you must, of course, have your cousin."

"Cousin?" asked D'Estes.

"Why play with me?" she cried, throwing out one slender arm. "What have you done with the girl?"

"A cousin," he said again. "Then she must be the daughter of my mother's sister. So," with a nod, "she was with De Roquesford. That is why he went to America. Grandfather kept a silent tongue for once. Aspasia, he lied to me; he said De Roquesford had gone to Brazil."

The woman smoked slowly, D'Estes drew on his cigarette until it was a long red glow. Finally he slumped down into his chair.

"Why should I?" he demanded.

"Why?" she questioned. "Would it be well to have another come to share all with you? Or is it because to some men a woman is everything?"

D'Estes laughed then, and got up:

"Which means, my beloved, that a woman is more to me than anything else. I take it my cousin is beautiful; you will at least give me that much credit."

"She is fair; it was because she was fair."

"When children are naughty their mothers say to them upon *l'île du bien-aimé*, 'Have a care, or Guy D'Estes will get you.' My shoulders have grown broad; I can assume even this. But," and now he frowned, "if Von Brunt should get your idea he would make me a strange drink. I should not like to die with pains in my stomach. Tell

the German to use the knife—it would be pleasanter."

He spoke half jestingly, half in seriousness.

"Von Brunt," whispered Lavaille; "what of your grandfather?"

D'Estes shrugged.

"Because you love me, Aspasia, and would marry me and have all—the Island—you would not have this thing suspected. It is sweet of you; I love my Aspasia for her thoughts. I am to sit down and tell you all. We will plan who is the one to blame with the thing. Would Karl do?"

She gestured impatiently.

"You saw the girl, you had a fancy for her! That is why you have done this thing."

"The reason why fits easily upon the shoulders of the man who loves much," he nodded. "Or perhaps," he mused, "you have thought I would not have all my grandfather's fortune if she came; or that I might marry this sweet cousin and still have all. Is it true that we can say Karl did it? Karl," with a look at her, "is stupid. Who, now, could have stirred his courage and his wit? Aspasia, you can marry grandfather—bitter pills come to all of us—you can marry him and get all!"

For the first time her eyes flashed fire.

"You would think that I did this thing?" she hissed. "De Roquesford was a gentleman."

"Turn, Aspasia, to the pages of history. Gentlemen have been murdered ere this."

"I would help you," she answered him, the flash of momentary hatred leaving her face.

"To find if my cousin is fair? What then would you do—to her?"

She rose swiftly from her chair and swept across the room. His eyes were upon her as she paced up and down, upon the clinging fold of her changing gown, the curve and quiver of each lithe muscle of her supple body.

When she stood in front of him and looked down into his face he thought suddenly of a wounded tiger that had torn his arm before he sent the last bullet crashing home.

"You will not tell me?" she demanded, holding her voice low and even.

"Shall I weave a tale of fancy? Only so can I satisfy."

"You will not," she cried. "Beware! I will marry D'Artois, and neither you nor she

shall have a sou! The place will see you no more. You shall be—" and her voice tense in its emotion broke suddenly. "No, no, *mon aimé*, no! I love you—you, my beloved!"

Her white arms went out to him, but he did not move. Slowly she sank at his feet and cast herself forward.

"*Mon aimé!*" she whispered with a sob.

He accepted her caresses with seeming indifference when he would have taken her gladly in his arms before. At last she straightened, gazed deep and long into his eyes, and, bending forward, touched his lips.

She rose slowly and turned to the piano at the far end of the room. As D'Estes sat, still low in his chair, making no move, she began to play. Her music throbbed with life, it spoke of love, passion. The room seemed filled with the whispers of the forest, life that was wild and free, of the way men loved under the burning sun of the tropics.

When she paused D'Estes got up slowly. He drew a heavy breath as if he found the atmosphere overcharged. He crossed to her, lifted one white hand and pressed it to his lips. Then he turned and without a word passed from the room.

 AS SHE heard him ride away she was on her feet, alive, active, startingly alert. She clapped her white hands twice.

From the shrubbery at the back a man sprang up and came swiftly to her. He took the hand she offered eagerly, but his eyes said that her hand was not what he longed for.

"Karl," she whispered, "you must follow. Watch him, find where he goes."

The light-haired German dropped her hand and drew a deep breath.

"Gordon, the American, is he not the one? He brought the man who came with De Roquesford from the cliff road. He must know."

She controlled her impatience as best she could.

"The man Monsieur Gordon carried to the parsonage must have been injured when De Roquesford was killed. That way will not find this girl; follow Guy D'Estes!"

Karl Hemming shrank back before her glance and stepped through the French window.

Madame Lavaille turned, and once again fell to pacing the room. Her white, full

bosom rose and fell, her fingers were clenched, her face, in passion, was no longer beautiful.

"He would marry her. Must, must I marry D'Artois? Guy," she cried, "*mon aimé*, must I marry him when I love but you?"

With a sob she sank into the nearest chair.

Hemming looked in through the window. His face was white, his lips curled in an ugly snarl.

His head lifted and his glance wavered toward the grounds. He had been told to follow and watch this man whom she whispered, to her soul, that she loved.

He would follow—he would, perhaps, do more.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER MOVE

GUY D'ESTES rode from Madame Lavaille's toward the village. Long before he reached it he knew that some one was following him and the thought brought a smile to his lips.

It was rather interesting to be followed; excitement was promised. He lived on excitement, not on troubled thoughts, and until he caught the beat of hoofs on the road behind him he had been having troubled thoughts.

This was rather unusual, for he was thinking of Aspasia Lavaille, and when he thought of her it was usually with brightening eye and hot blood in his veins. Now he was cold, dispassionate, uneasy.

What was she going to do? He was trying to determine. He was prepared to admit that he loved her; he loved all women pleasing to the eye. He was also conscious of the fact that she had strength, courage, and would go far to gain her end. He was also wondering whether he was afraid of her, and this was strange, for upon the Island of the Beloved it was said—and with good ground—that Guy D'Estes feared neither saint nor sinner, priest nor devil.

As troubled thoughts are least liked by men who take life easily, Guy D'Estes welcomed the following horseman as a means of taking himself out of himself.

He rode into the village, left his horse with a black, within a court-yard, and went on his way afoot. He looked back as he turned into a narrow alley and his smile broadened.

He would have laughed had the man who trailed him been clever, for that would have promised better sport.

He could have turned about quickly and come out into the open, so facing the man he had seen, but not recognized. Instead he went on through narrow ways, into low huts, courts—now and then stopping for a word—always welcomed royally, until he had wended his way through a greater part of the town.

When he at last found himself close to the foot of the cliff road he paused. From his boot-leg he drew a short rapier, looked to the button on the point and shoved it back into its novel scabbard.

At the very foot of the hill he halted again, and saw the shadow of the man who dogged his steps slip behind a bush. D'Estes uttered a low call, the plaintive note of the night-bird, and received an answer. He went ahead toward a clump of low palms.

"Beloved," he said, "you must not come out. I am followed. *Ma chérie*, say what you have found and then swiftly home."

The answer came quickly, Zetel's voice low and sweet.

"And I have found nothing that I would know," said D'Estes, when she paused. "To-morrow will bring news perhaps. I kiss my hand to you, sweet Zetel."

"You will be cautious?" she begged. "Who is it that follows you?"

"I shall find out," laughed D'Estes, and he went swiftly up the hill.

Once in the dark shadows of the cliff road he began to hurry, pausing only when he came to the spot where he could look down and see the light in Hunter's cottage.

For a moment he had a mind to make still another call that night, but in the end decided differently. Yet the temptation was strong, for deep in his breast he felt a longing to speak with Elsa Grey.

 IT WAS the fascination one has for things that are unknown and, in a way, not understood. He knew that the American girl was different from any other woman he had ever met. It was no reflection upon Marjory Hunter that D'Estes had never found her interesting, as certainly it was none upon Elsa Grey that he did.

The minister's wife was far too placid of temperament; it was not for the reason that she was a married woman. Elsa Grey's

vivid buoyancy, her beauty, the vitality that radiated from every act and speech appealed strongly to him. But more than that he knew her for what she was. When he talked with her for long he suffered mental quivers. He even saw himself as people pictured him; fit for the ground under foot, to be stirred to dirtiness, good for nothing else.

The thing that pleased D'Estes more than anything else was that by no word nor hint had Elsa ever suggested that she had heard the stories told about him. He could have said as much for Hunter and his wife.

His mind was running on these truths as he hurried ahead, to pause for the second time where the road was marked by many feet. With a sharp glance behind him, holding still, as a beast of the jungle might, and bending to listen, he studied the road.

He saw where men had moved quickly, where the carriage had stopped, where two bodies had lain. Then he stepped into the brush at the roadside.

A man came up the road and passed him. Then D'Estes stepped out and called:

"Come back, my friend! Come back!"

The man halted, turned, started forward and stopped. D'Estes was not sure, but he thought that he had recognized the breadth of shoulders and the blond hair.

"Come back," he called again with a jeering note in his voice. "Cowards trail!" and he laughed.

Then he saw a white hand dart across toward the man's belt. The next minute the fellow did as he was bade—he came back on the run.

"Good," said D'Estes, but he made no move, not even offering to draw his booted rapier, although he caught the gleam of the knife in the man's hand.

Three feet from D'Estes the man shot forward in one bound. Then the Count's grandson put out his hand, caught the lifted wrist and spun the German off his feet with so little effort that the attack seemed childish.

As he flung Hemming into the dust and the knife dropped to the road D'Estes began to laugh, a soft, nasty laugh that would have stirred any one to anger.

"Run," he advised, "run, and see if you can keep your feet. You are free; there is your knife. Find it and run!"

Karl Hemming got up out of the dust dazed and white to his lips with rage. He

did not even look at his tormentor, but found his knife first. Then he faced about. He was trembling with rage and, being little less than a fanatic, Madame Lavaille his fetish, he did not fear Guy D'Estes as did most men.

"Got it?" questioned D'Estes when he saw that Hemming was armed again. "I am waiting. If you will not run, do not keep me so long."

The German uttered a wild cry of rage and leaped forward.

D'Estes awaited him as before, measuring the distance with a calm eye. When Hemming was close upon him, and the German watching that his wrist should not be seized again, D'Estes side-stepped with the cleverness of the trained boxer. At the same moment the flat of his hand went out, caught the German full in the cheek and with one quick forearm drive sent him reeling into a palm.

"I have a sword here in my boot-leg, a short rapier, Karl Hemming. I will give it you; it would lend you distance!"

D'Estes had seemingly done all he could to stir his antagonist, but this last insult, uttered in a calm, dispassionate voice, was the worst of all.

Hemming gave the Count's grandson no time to make good his offer, but straightened and rushed again. As he leaped ahead with a wild bellow a shout came from up the road.



D'ESTES shot a look behind him, lost his charging adversary for one second, and so moved too late. He felt the hot, searing sting of the knife in his shoulder and the next moment was flat on his back, the German on top.

For the first time D'Estes seemed alive. With lightning-like blows he struck Hemming in the face. The German was ready to take punishment if he could get his knife clear and plant it once more, but a little truer. D'Estes' eyes flashed murder even as did the German's. The breath of the two men came swift and hard. Over they rolled, Hemming still on top, still striving to get home the telling thrust. The German had the weight, and in a rough and tumble fight the better of the chances.

Yet D'Estes held him off. Twice he felt the knife go through his coat, once it slashed the skin over the ribs, but he swung his body just enough to save his heart.

When Hemming saw the folly of his attack he got his dagger between his lips and set his fingers on D'Estes' throat.

The Count's grandson fought like a fiend, but he was down, with a weight upon his body he could not dislodge, and slowly he saw the darkness of the night grow red, black and blurred.

The blood drummed in his ears, and in the drumming he thought he caught the rush of feet. If he was not sure, Hemming felt no doubt. Some one was coming, nearer and nearer. The German let go with one hand, reached for his knife and raised it.

The next instant something struck him full in the face and he was knocked clear of D'Estes and into the dust. When he looked up he saw Gordon standing over him, fists clenched.

For a moment Hemming lay perfectly still, too dazed to move. Then slowly he got his wits and the instant he did he was on his feet and off down the road, running like mad.

Then Gordon turned around and saw Guy D'Estes adjusting his collar.

"A strange way to find me," smiled D'Estes, speaking slowly, "on the bottom. You did it, Gordon. I heard you coming and turned to look, then he landed. But I can't complain now, can I? Thanks," and he held out his hand.

Gordon made no move to accept. He stood looking at D'Estes, and a frown was upon his forehead. His eyes had noted the road, and he felt queer to come upon one murder and a second attempt the same night at the same spot.

"Who was he?" he demanded suddenly.

"The runaway?" smiled D'Estes. "I have no idea; dark as the devil."

"And you have *friends* who would serve you that trick in such number that you can't guess?" added Gordon.

"Perhaps I have. It is not bad to have them. Spice is hard to find in life."

"You seemed to have no trouble."

D'Estes moved a little nearer.

"That's so," he nodded. "And I may have more coming to me. If grandfather thinks I killed De Roquesford it will be lively."

"Did you?" Gordon shot the question out with hardly a thought.

D'Estes came even nearer.

"You ask me that? De Roquesford was an old man. Did you like him?"

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER THE BALCONY

"I did," agreed Gordon.

"Yet you ask if I killed him. They will all be asking that to-morrow."

"I think they will," admitted Gordon.

"And when they ask you, what will you say?" smiled the Count's grandson.

"Why should I say anything? A man does not have to express himself because he is put a question."

D'Estes' smile left his face.

"Very well," he said and turned abruptly to take his leave.

Then Gordon did a strange thing. He stepped close to D'Estes and held out his hand. It came to him suddenly that he had refused a man his belief when there was no good reason for him to think he was guilty. He had told D'Artois, after Von Brunt left, that he did not think D'Estes was guilty. Now he would not say as much to the man himself.

His hesitancy had said what all would say. Guy D'Estes might need a little help, he might even find it of some consolation to know that some one believed in him. Down in his heart Gordon did not think he was guilty.

D'Estes took his hand, and his face lighted with a smile.

"Thanks," he said and with a light wave and nod dived into the bushes and was lost to sight.

Gordon was surprised at his sudden move. Then he shrugged and went on to the village to leave a message for the Count.

This done, he started for Hunter's place. He walked rapidly, for he had more work to do that night. Already a search was on foot; he and D'Artois had arranged for that after Von Brunt's departure. He had a good deal to do, but first he must find how Burnett was faring under Von Brunt's hand and if possible get certain information from the American lawyer.

He went up the veranda steps in a bound, down the hall and along the side one to the bedroom where the injured American had been left.

He opened the door and stopped short. The bed was empty! With a spring he was back in the hall and knocking on Hunter's door. When he got no answer he turned the knob.

Before him, bolt upright in three chairs, sat Hunter, his wife, and Elsa Grey, motionless and silent bound hand and foot and gagged!

AS HUNTER and Gordon made certain that neither Marjorie nor Elsa had suffered from the treatment accorded them, the minister told Gordon what had happened.

Elsa had answered a summons at the door only to be seized. Mrs. Hunter had been apprehended in the hall, and when she shrieked and her husband dashed from the bedside of the sick American a heavy bag had been thrust over his head.

Three men had taken part in the attack, tied the Americans securely, gagged them, and gone quickly down the hall and into the next room. No violence had been offered, and no one was actually the worse for the experience. But Burnett was gone.

"Von Brunt! Where was Von Brunt?" demanded Gordon, when he had heard the facts in breathless rage.

"Didn't he come with you?" suggested Hunter.

In answer heavy steps came down the hall and the next instant the German doctor stepped into the doorway.

"Where have you been?" thundered Gordon, facing about.

"Ach! Devils in flight! Where have I been? A black met me on the road and said that lawyer fool had been taken to the château."

"A black met you on the road and told you that!" said Gordon savagely. "Then what did you do?"

"Do?" Von Brunt looked the four over. "Tramped back again to find I had been lied to handsomely. Where is he?"

"Burnett? Carried off," replied Gordon.

Von Brunt heard the story, his face growing redder each moment. He began to swear and stopped with a rough apology. He was savage, however, and made no scruple of his desire to wreak vengeance.

He said that he had come down the path and so supposed that he must have missed the cart going up; that, when he turned about, he went back to the château by the road, thinking he would overtake the cart. Thus he explained how he had missed Gordon, who had also come down across the fields, as had the Doctor, following a trail so steep few climbed it on the way up.

When he had quite finished fuming about,

he went off, declaring he'd have the truth without waiting for D'Artois to act. The last heard of him was his deep bass pouring forth vindictive words upon the world in general.

Gordon looked at Hunter.

"I should like to know where Guy D'Estes was the last half-hour," suggested the minister.

"Sam, you do not think he would have done this?" exclaimed Mrs. Hunter.

"I'd like to know where Von Brunt has been," retorted Gordon. Then he turned to the minister. "Guy D'Estes was on the cliff road getting stabbed but a very short time ago."

The two girls and Hunter looked their astonishment. Gordon settled down into a chair, and leaning forward with elbows on knees, told briefly of what had happened at the château and of his meeting with D'Estes.

"You went to the village after D'Estes dodged into the brush," suggested Hunter.

"Yes, but I do not believe he rushed down here and set his men to this last job."

"He was not one of the three men," said Elsa with positiveness.

Gordon got up. "So long as Burnett is gone, I fancy there is no more danger. I'm off for the village."

"You are going to try to find something that will throw a little light on affairs, now all is dark?" suggested the girl.

Gordon looked at her and nodded. "D'Artois has started a hunt; I am going to look up certain things for him. You will stay here, Hunter?"

"I think so; I would like to go, but will I stay."

Gordon gave a nod, clapped on his hat and went out into the garden. There was plenty to occupy his mind as he hurried toward the village.



WHY should he be so ready to defend D'Estes and think Von Brunt guilty? But when he came to consider this question he decided that he didn't really believe the German responsible. His story might look strange, yet it was possible, and actually he had no reason to fancy that the man who had loved De Roquesford could be guilty of his murder. Of course the people who had got Burnett out of the way were the ones who had the girl and the Frenchman's body.

It looked like a tangle; it looked a much

deeper one when three days passed and all the clues that were unearthed proved false.

Gordon had tried to find the carriage De Roquesford secured when he landed, and after a day of hunting located the native driver. The man could tell of the attack, of how he took to the woods, and nothing more. He had a faint idea of what D'Artois' granddaughter looked like, but it was no better description than had been furnished by the curious natives who had seen the Frenchman land with his two American companions. The girl was declared wonderfully attractive; some said she had light hair, others black; nothing was gained upon which they could go.

It really came down to the point that they might pass Celia Haverstraw on the road and not know her unless she spoke. One and all began to grow horribly restless. Gordon gave up his work and prowled here and there. Hunter was on the move, searching in what quarters he thought chance rumor might be met with. D'Artois went to bed with his gout, and cursed the two native servants—the only two he said he could trust with the truth—for not bringing him news. Von Brunt said little. He put on black for De Roquesford, buried his chin in his chest, his hands in his pockets, and with his pipe in his mouth walked the château terrace.

Elsa Grey and Marjory Hunter could talk of nothing else. On the second day Elsa left the parsonage and went for a walk. At dusk Gordon passed her on the hill road in company with Guy D'Estes. The astonishment of the American was genuine. When he saw her the next morning in Hunter's garden and the Count's grandson at her side he went to the minister.

Hunter shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "I have asked Marjory and she knows nothing. Do you suppose Elsa thinks she can worm something out of D'Estes?"

"As likely as not, but she can't," and Gordon set off for the château wondering why he had ever liked D'Estes or expressed confidence in him.

In the afternoon he was back at Hunter's to learn that Elsa and D'Estes had gone for a walk, the château their proposed goal. He turned around and decided that he would go back to work.

As he mounted the hill his thoughts were not pleasant. Still he was fair enough not to

allow himself to harbor wrong theories concerning D'Estes, even when he admitted that he would have felt better had he not known that the Count's grandson was meeting with such favors.

It seemed that between D'Estes and his grandfather Elsa Grey's time was pretty well occupied.

Gordon went to his room in the château and turned over sketches and plans with a ruthless hand. At last he found an unfinished drawing of the old banquet-hall, now a picture-gallery, and he resolved to get at his work. He lighted his pipe and halted at the window.



BELOW him lay a sun-bathed court. In the center plashed a fountain, and the water of the pool glittered like gold. The grass and palms about the stone curbing were green and fresh, and the somber lines of the building held the whole like an oasis in a desert, a restful spot, a place for meditation.

Gordon's thoughts—looking down upon the green—convinced him that a man's feelings could be strange indeed. He remembered the first time he had met Elsa; he recalled the past months in her company. He had seen a great deal of her; now he was acting a little like a child because he saw less.

She was of the type who like all men; who, when they at last come to like one the best, give no sign. He nodded; he knew he was right, and he went down through the long halls to his work.

The old picture-gallery was a high-posted, balconied room which, in columned walks and arched ceiling, had the effect of some old chapel. Dim shafts of light reached the lower floor, the pictures were all upon the balcony. A hushed silence pervaded nook and alcove and the American's footsteps rang upon the stone flags with solemn cadence.

He went to a seat under the balcony at the far end and fell to work. For half an hour his pencil flew fast, and then he found himself, with pad on knee, his eyes fixed upon the shadowy walk beneath the farther balcony.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright. From a side door came D'Artois and he leaned heavily upon Miss Grey's arm. The Count's lean, eagle-like face was wreathed in smiles,

but a smile that seemed touched with craft and senile passion.

They crossed a shaft of light from the upper windows, and Elsa's hair turned golden red. She was speaking in a low voice, her face alive with animation. D'Artois stumbled at her side, his drawn brows covering eyes that devoured her face.

Gordon came near rising. The two went down the room and sank side by side upon a bench directly in the American's line of vision.

He could not hear what they said, but still he felt he should make his presence known. He rose to his feet and was about to step forth when the very door by which the two had entered swung slowly open.

Standing where he was, Gordon could look straight down under the balcony and so commanded a view of the opening door. Across the room sat D'Artois and Elsa. To reach them one could either cross the open floor or pass along under the balcony and behind the heavy pillars.

The door swung back, and out slipped Madame Lavaille! Her gliding footsteps gave no sound. One hand went out to the pillar and she bent forward, her eyes set upon the two in earnest conversation.

Gordon caught his breath. He had a clear view of the woman's face. He wondered that he had ever thought her beautiful.

Suddenly he moved. Madame Lavaille had started toward the far end of the room.

Her tense emotion was plain to any eyes; the look upon her face no man could doubt. But Gordon had seen more than her mere expression of face and crouching figure.

In long, silent strides he came upon her from behind. She halted; out went her hand and again she bent forward to fix upon D'Artois and Elsa Grey a look that was filled with hatred. She was as the serpent, the tigress about to spring, and so intent was she that Gordon's approach fell upon deaf ears.

As she straightened to go on, his long fingers closed about her wrist. Like a flash the Frenchwoman swung upon him. Her face looked into his, distorted and savage for just a second, and then she smiled.

Gordon stepped back and drew her after him into the deep recess of an alcove. Then with his free hand he took the dagger from her clasp and stepped back.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Spotted Passport

by
Stephen
Allen
Reynolds



WE HAD just returned from an early morning canter around the Park, and were enjoying a leisurely breakfast, when the man-hunter was summoned to the telephone. He quickly rejoined me however, and finished his grapefruit before he spoke.

"If you've nothing in particular to do to-day, I'd be glad to have you put in the day with me at headquarters," Parr remarked, adding, "I may be able to give you a thrill or two, but I can't make any promises."

Always pleased to learn more of the workings of the International Bureau of Investigation, I accepted Godfrey Parr's invitation gladly. Never as yet had he disappointed me in the matter of thrills; in fact, some of the days spent in the company of the master thief-taker had been all but too thrilling and exciting for a nervous wastrel like myself.

"There's a chap that the Bankers' Protective Association want very badly," Parr explained as we sped down-town. "He's a tall, bearded, powerfully built fellow that I've been watching for some time. He's been forging drafts and raising checks for the last two years or so, and has managed to fool the Association men up to date. When they laid for him in Seattle he bobbed up in Chicago and relieved the Traders' and Drovers' National of two thousand. They were hot on his trail in Texas—had men covering Dallas, San Antonio and Galveston; what does he do but show up in Salt Lake City and trim a Mormon bank by means of a 'phony' certified check!

"He never dresses twice alike; never tells

the same story twice; always has some new method for identifying himself; and his raised checks and forged drafts are some of the finest examples of 'scratch-work' ever shoved under a banker's nose. I've watched this man's work for some time, but not having been retained by any of the interested parties, I've kept my hands off. From to-day on, though, I'm after him. That telephone message was from the secretary of the Bankers' Protective Association. The bankers want results. I've taken the case. The ball starts rolling to-day!"

Reaching the office-building, I followed Parr to the elevator, and we were soon seated in his inner office. A cablegram or two and some brief typewritten reports occupied his attention for a few minutes, after which the detective turned to a filing-case and selected an envelope. Newspaper clipping after clipping was read, and a brief memorandum and date set down on a scratch-pad at the detective's elbow.

"It would appear as though this fellow Bond, alias 'Crabbe,' alias 'Winslow,' has a system in his skipping around from city to city."

Parr arose, pad in hand, and studied a large wall map of the United States which hung near him.

"His jumps are alternately east and west, and north and south. According to last accounts he pulled off a little trick in Buffalo last week. That would being him east for the next trick, and unless I'm very much mistaken he'll be heard from right here in New York City before long—that is, if he keeps on with his system of——"

The buzz of a telephone instrument on the flat-topped desk interrupted the detective. Without completing his sentence he lifted the receiver and grasped a pencil. A short conversation ensued, for the most part inaudible to me. Parr noted an address, hung up the receiver, and reached for his hat.

"Come on," said he quietly, "the Second National of Jamaica has just 'phoned the Association that this fellow Bond is on the job. He was attempting to pass a raised check. The bank officer recognized him and asked him to wait a few moments while he went to the vault for large bills. The bank porter was warned, and the police notified. Bond's suspicions became aroused. He started to leave the bank. The porter barred his way, flourishing a revolver which had been slipped to him. Bond put his hand in his pocket and shot the porter—pocket-shot fashion, I take it—and then jumped into a taxicab waiting at the door. The chauffeur drove away. Bond's pistol against his ear. When the police arrived, the porter was dead. I'm after a murderer now—it makes the game a bit more worth while!"

II

 "I'LL tell you all I know in a very few words," began the cashier after Parr had declined an invitation to view the remains of the unfortunate porter. "This man Bond has been around here for several days. The first time he came in here he purchased a draft on Philadelphia—three hundred dollars. He paid spot cash for it. The second time he came in he made a formal application to open an account with us. He claimed to be a follower of the races—wanted to be within touch of ready money during the Aqueduct meet. He deposited a small amount of cash, and a few small drafts for collection.

"Upon the occasion of his last visit, made to-day, our paying teller saw him for the first time. The teller had been under the weather for a few days. Bond, or 'Winters' as he chose to call himself while in Jamaica, presented for payment what appeared to be a certified check on the First National Bank of Brookline, Massachusetts. It called for four thousand dollars. He asked for one thousand in cash for immediate use at the race-track, and requested that we forward to Brookline for collection.

"Something in the man's appearance aroused the paying teller's suspicions. The story seemed too smooth to be true; he scented something wrong, particularly as the physical appearance of the stranger corresponded somewhat to that of the swindler described by the circulars of the Bankers' Protective Association.

"The teller informed him that the check seemed to be regularly drawn and certified, but that he must have some certain method of identifying the payee before he could advance anything upon it. Thereupon, Bond pulled out this document."

The cashier handed a paper to Parr. From my position, just behind the detective, I saw that it was a United States passport. It appeared most unquestionably genuine, was in favor of one James B. Winters, of Niagara Falls, New York, who, according to the description, must have been a person five feet ten inches in height, with gray eyes, a prominent nose, and dark-brown hair streaked with gray.

"It's a bit yellow in spots for a document less than a year old," Parr observed as he glanced at the date. "Is this all he left behind?"

The bank official nodded. "Then the man got suspicious, shot the porter who barred his way, and went off in a taxi."

"Did you get its license number?" Parr snapped out the question as he pocketed the passport.

"Fortunately, yes. It was a red one, and bore a license-plate with the number 49,062. We also learned that the man has been occupying a room at the Bush road-house on the Rockaway turnpike. He's been staying there several days."

 WITHOUT making reply, Parr entered a telephone-booth and closed the door behind him. Five minutes later he came forth and shared his information with us.

"Police Headquarters say that license No. 49,062 is held by the Metropolitan Taxicab Company. The badly scared driver of the car has already reported that the man held a gun on him all the way from Jamaica to the Grand Central Depot. It looks like a pretty clean get-away."

Parr eyed the bluecoats on duty before the door leading into an anteroom. The precinct plain-clothes men were in there, closeted with the coroner. The outer doors

of the bank had been closed and locked. "I'd like to see that certified check," said Parr, turning to the cashier.

The bank official crossed the counting-room and quickly returned with a paper in his hand. An elderly man followed him, in the person of the paying teller of the institution.

"What peculiarities, if any, did this man have?" asked Parr, the brief introduction over.

"He indorsed the check with his left hand. This was one of the peculiarities of the man Bond, according to the circular-letter sent out by the Association. It made me look him over more carefully. When I felt sure that it was the swindler, I created a delay and quietly notified the police. There was one other little matter which I noticed, although it's probably of very little importance. He limped slightly, favoring either his right leg or foot, much as if he had a slight touch of rheumatism or a tight-fitting shoe."

Parr surveyed the check. In appearance, it seemed regular. The rubber-stamped certification of the Brookline bank:

GOOD WHEN PROPERLY ENDORSED.
PAYABLE THROUGH THE
BOSTON CLEARING HOUSE
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF
BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS.

stood out in purple characters, just above what purported to be the signature of its cashier.

As the detective turned the check over, I saw plainly that the indorsement, "James B. Winters," had been written in a free-handed, connected style. Evidently the pen had not been raised from the paper until the last stroke had been completed.

"Will you kindly direct us to the road-house you mentioned?" Parr asked the cashier. "There's nothing more to be done here at present."

Following the directions, we soon found the Bush establishment, and paved the way by means of certain expenditures at the bar. The shirt-sleeved proprietor informed us that Mr. Winters had been his guest for three days, that he had been a quiet, orderly person, that he walked with a limp, and that he had paid in advance, having no baggage.

A visit to the room which had been occu-

pied by the murderer, and which he had given up that morning, proved fruitless in so far as clues were concerned, but an interview with the maid-of-all-work turned out more satisfactorily. After the departure of Winters, she had placed the room in order; had picked up some scraps of paper and an empty bottle or two. The only thing that seemed to have been overlooked by the departing guest was a small nickel-plated wrench about five inches in length.

Parr examined the wrench closely, but aside from the fact that it was a double-ended tool with a hexagonal-shaped opening in each end, and bore the countersunk initials "H. & H.," I could not see that it differed from any other sewing-machine or typewriter tool. At this juncture Parr slipped a banknote into the willing hand of the servant and asked her to fetch the sweepings of the room, together with the empty bottles and bits of paper she had mentioned.

Luckily, the rubbish had not yet been burned or otherwise disposed of, and after a short absence the maid returned to the living-room and laid a parcel before us. An empty bottle which had once contained a popular brand of ink-erasing fluid, a piece of blue blotting-paper, a few scraps of paper, a soiled collar innocent of laundry marks, and some crumpled telegraph-blanks, were its contents.

An hour later found us at the headquarters of the International Bureau.

III

 THE scraps of paper were disappointing, inasmuch as they were perfectly blank. The empty bottle was a significant reminder that our man was a forger, and that the ink-erasing fluid which it once held was necessarily a tool of his trade, but otherwise it seemed a useless clue. The soiled collar told Parr that its owner was accustomed to wearing a number sixteen; yet the lack of laundry marks upon the article indicated that it might have been purchased at any one of ten thousand retail stores within a thousand miles of New York. At any rate, it offered no solution to the two questions uppermost in my mind: "Who and what is this man Bond?" and "Where is he now?"

The crumpled telegraph-blanks were straightened out, but turned out to be blank

indeed. Half of them were Western Union forms; the balance bore the heading of the Postal Telegraph Company. The blotting-paper had been used, but in such a way that it conveyed no message to Parr. He studied its mirrored reflection for fully ten minutes without being able to make out a single legible word. So far, the clues were all very disappointing.

Summoning one of his operatives from the outer office, Parr handed him the Brookline check and called his particular attention to the indorsement upon its back.

"You see this handwriting upon the back of the check?" he began. "Note it well. While I work this end of the case I want you to slip over to Jamaica and visit the two telegraph-offices of the rival companies. I have an idea that my man has been using the wire lately, otherwise he wouldn't have been carrying these blanks around with him. You will look over the filed messages for three days back. You will bring to me any messages you may find written in the same free-running hand. I want the originals. I'll have the authority for you over the 'phone long before you get across the river. Look particularly at all 'blind' or code messages."

His man could hardly have had time to reach the subway station before Parr secured telephonic authority for him to search the files of the two Jamaica telegraph-offices. The man-hunter then gave his undivided attention to the bookcases which lined his office. I noted that the first book he consulted was a business directory. He seemed to find what he was looking for, for he turned quickly to his telephone-book and noted a number upon a scratch-pad.

"There's only one hardware firm which has the initials 'H. & H.,'" he muttered, as if speaking to himself. "And that can hardly be called a hardware firm, for they deal in surgical instruments."

I asked no questions. I knew that Parr would speak when he was ready, not before. Taking up the passport, Parr scrutinized it closely. Not satisfied with what his naked vision told him, he brought a magnifying glass to bear upon the document. After some minutes, he broke the silence again.

"It's a peculiarity of the particular ink-erasing compound used by this man, that while it acts readily upon most writing fluids in common use, it fails to eat up the printed characters upon a paper. Nor does

it have any effect upon the ink used for automatic numbering-machines. The yellow spots upon this document show that he has used it, probably for the purpose of identifying himself at some bank or hotel, upon more than one occasion—after having given it a bath in the erasing compound, and then filling in the blanks with a fictitious name.

"If he'd taken more pains when he rinsed and dried the paper, the yellow spots would never have shown. Fortunately, the serial number is quite as legible as ever, and it won't take a great while to find out who got the original passport. I have a notion that, between the Department of State, the two telegraph companies, and the surgical-instrument house, we'll soon have 'Mr. Bond' with his trouser-legs slit up and the electrodes fastened to the back of his neck."

The picture was anything but a pleasant one, but as I called to mind the cowardly murder of the porter, I hoped that my man-hunting club-fellow would soon strike a warm trail.



TURNING to his desk telephone, Parr called up successively the firm of Hardee & Harrison, the general offices of the West Shore Railroad, and the chief of the division of passports of the Department of State. I gathered that the surgical-instrument house gave him important information, but the roar of Broadway drowned most of the one-sided conversation. From what I could overhear of his talk with the railroad officials, I judged that he was making inquiries of the chief clerk regarding a former employee.

Washington responded quickly. A brief question, followed by a ten-minute wait, and Parr's pencil raced over the scratch-pad. As he hung up the receiver and leaned back in his chair, I proposed that we lunch. I was well aware of Parr's habit of neglecting the inner man while occupied with a case.

"Guess we'll have time to have a bite at Savarin's," he consented, snapping his watch shut.

"Savarin's!" he called to his office chief as we passed through the outer room. "If you hear from Jamaica, let me know right away."

"The waiter was just filling our demi-tasses, when Parr's operative approached our corner and handed his employer the originals of two telegraph messages. I saw

at a glance that they had unquestionably been penned by the murderer. The flowing penmanship, the peculiar slant of the left-handed writer, were unmistakable. Looking first at one and then at the other, I saw Parr frown.

"That's all," he informed his man. "You may report at headquarters when you've lunched."

Parr sipped his coffee slowly, the telegrams spread out before him. Suddenly his face cleared. He grasped a lead-pencil and, seizing a menu wrote rapidly, glancing alternately at each telegram. With a grim chuckle he completed his task, and then sent the waiter for a New York Central time-table.

"See what you can make out of 'em, Clarke," he bade me, simultaneously pushing the yellow sheets toward my side of the table.

One message, written on a Postal Telegraph Company's form, read as follows:

BEN TILSON,
ADIRONDACK HOUSE,
UTICA, N. Y.

Long provisioned and good. Have six due.
Night chain. Dock me. Wait.

The other telegram was written on a Western Union blank. It was addressed to the same person, and had been forwarded at about the same time. Like the first, it bore no signature. The body of the message ran as follows:

Stay for Lodge. Order boat. Fifty at train.
Saturday. Fulton at for.

Although I read this message backwards and tried transposing the words, it seemed fully as blind as the first. The messages conveyed but little meaning to me, save that Bond had an accomplice at Utica, that he wished to have a boat ordered for him, and that two men named "Fulton" and "Lodge" were in some way concerned.

"If you'll pardon me for a few minutes, I'll call up the Fourth Deputy Commissioner of Police," Parr said, pushing back his chair. "I want two Central Office men, with a John Doe warrant, to meet me at the Grand Central early to-morrow morning. You're also invited—that is, if you feel like spending a day and a night out of town."

Ten minutes later, the detective rejoined me, and over our second cigar proceeded to enlighten me further.

"The case looked a bit difficult at first," he began. "Some of these easy cases do look hard at the start."

"You speak as if the case were complete," I put in.

"It's all over but the shouting," returned Parr. "I know our man's correct name, his past history, and all I need know about him. I know where he is at the present moment. But, most important of all, I know just where we're going to nail him to-morrow night about seven o'clock. These are the facts: His name is John March. He was born at Saratoga Springs, New York, and is forty years of age. He's an expert telegraph-operator, and was for a number of years in the employ of the West Shore Railroad Company. He was discharged on account of irregularities while acting as station-master. During his railroading experience he lost his right leg, and was subsequently furnished with an artificial limb by the firm of Hardee & Harrison of this city.

"Last year he forwarded the necessary affidavits, sworn personal description, and fee, to the Department of State, whereupon United States passport No. 522,748 was furnished him. To-morrow afternoon, according to this time-table, he will leave a point just south of the Canadian border, and will reach the Fulton Chain station of the New York Central at ten minutes of seven—if the train is on time. He will proceed to a boat-landing to meet this man Tilson. We will arrest him; and in due time—in the course of a year or two—he will be electrocuted. At the present moment, he is speeding north aboard New York Central train No. 11. He's planning to lay over somewhere to-morrow, but that's immaterial to us.

IV

 AT FIVE-THIRTY the next evening, in a drizzling rain, our train pulled into Fulton Chain. An obliging station-agent ransacked his cup-board for rubber coats and umbrellas, and I thankfully exchanged my thin-soled shoes for a pair of rubber boots, as we were assured that the mud would be deep in the vicinity of the landing. Luckily for Parr—as it turned out afterward—a second pair of rubber boots was found, which he donned.

Leaving one of the Central Office men

behind to satisfy the curiosity of the agent and to see that all went smooth at the station, we ascertained the location of the landing, and set forth. A half-mile tramp along a muddy country road brought us to the boat-landing at the head of a lake; and there we found a power-boat tied to the dock, guarded by "Ben" Tilson, a rough-and-ready specimen of the Adirondack guide.

His homely face lighted up with pleasure at our approach. He answered Parr's questions frankly and without hesitation. It was soon established that he had nothing to conceal, and that he was not connected with any of the criminal enterprises of John March, alias "Winters."

It seemed that March employed Tilson by the month to care for the boat and look after a hunting-lodge across the lake. March had been extremely irregular in his visits to the camp, however, and the guide had found his position almost a sinecure. Tilson thought that his employer was a writer, because, while at the lodge, he had spent much of his time with pen and paper.

Finding it lonely at the camp, Tilson had complained to his employer, and had obtained permission to visit in Utica. March had instructed him, however, to call twice daily at the Adirondack House, so that he might be reached by telegraph. For some unknown reason, March told him that in case he ever telegraphed, he would do so by means of a double message. To make sense out of his messages, one must read them in conjunction.

Tilson was about to explain March's code, when a peal of thunder drowned his voice. The rain came down faster than ever, and we were forced to seek shelter beneath a shed near the landing. From our position we commanded a view of the railway as it skirted the border of the lake farther to the northward. It had long since grown dark, but every few moments the entire scene was bathed in light, for long tongues of lightning were licking the mountain-tops beyond the lake.

And then the headlight of a train appeared—March's train—creeping southward along the tracks. She was on time. Tersely, almost harshly, Parr warned Tilson that our party was there to arrest his employer, and cautioned him not to interfere. Parr then warned the astonished guide to remain with his boat, and gave us the signal to take up our stations back along the narrow road, on either side of it.



BETWEEN thunderclaps, we heard the whistle of the locomotive as it roared down the grade below the station. Fifteen or twenty minutes passed. I was thinking of my comfortable rooms at the club, and wondering what Godfrey Parr saw in a detective's life to tempt him from a more comfortable method of gaining a livelihood, when there came a rude interruption.

A burly form came into view just abreast of us. Parr sprang into the roadway, followed by Connors, the Central Office man. I heard a sharp command, followed by a snarling reply. March leaped back, A flash of lightning quite close at hand made it possible for me to see the murderer feel for a weapon.

Shouting "*Don't!*" even as they leaped upon him, I saw the man-hunters close in on their prey; and the next instant all three were rolling in the mud. Darkness blotted out the details of the struggle from my view. Horrible oaths came from one of them. Then came a scream of pain, followed by a groan. Silence ensued.

I had been cautioned not to interfere under any consideration, but at this juncture I approached the heap of silent men, just as a pencil of light flashed over the purple face of the undermost man. Godfrey Parr was upon one knee. In his right hand he held an electric pocket lamp. His left thumb was pressed into the unconscious man's throat at a point beneath the bearded jaw just over the left carotid artery. Fast between the teeth of the prisoner was Connors' thumb. In his disengaged hand—with fingers itching to pull the trigger, I dare say—I noted his Colt .38.

"I hate to choke a man, but I guess you need that thumb in your business," Parr remarked as he handcuffed the prisoner and relieved him of a revolver.

The rain, beating full upon the upturned face of the prisoner, soon brought him back to a blasphemous state of consciousness, and a few minutes later we were retracing our steps toward the railway station. I was walking side by side with Parr; March was walking abreast of us; while Connors, nursing his injured thumb, brought up in the rear.

"You've got nothing on me, Mister Man!" shouted March, before we had gone far. Evidently he was trying to draw Parr out.

"I think we have enough," Parr returned calmly. "We've got a little bottle, a check, a passport, a telegram or two, and a little wrench that you left behind in Jamaica. I think we have enough to seat you in the chair."

"But you'll never do it, you ——!" screamed March. "I've got enough money to hire the best lawyers in the country! I can stall along for years on appeals! You'll never live long enough to see me in the chair! I'm not afraid of you detective buzzards! I'm not afraid of the courts! There's nothing in heaven or on earth that I'm afraid of! You can ——"

But his sentence was never completed in this world, for a blinding ribbon of lightning felled us all to the ground.

When I regained my senses and struggled to my feet, I saw Connors and Parr stooping over a blackened, lifeless Thing! I looked at the grim sight disclosed by Parr's pocket-lantern—and turned away.

The Almighty had electrocuted John March after His own fashion, doubtlessly disgusted with the delays incident to a modern trial in New York State for the crime of murder.

V



"THE wrench and the limp were the most significant clues," explained Parr that night as we sat drying ourselves before the open fire of a mountain tavern near the station. "Every wrench—with the possible exception of the ordinary monkey-wrench—is made for some specific purpose. Thus, we have the engineer's two-jawed spanner, the plumber's pipe-wrench, the bicycle-rider's pocket-wrench, and so on. This particular wrench was made expressly for the purpose of tightening up the nuts and bolt-heads in an artificial limb. The initials 'H. & H.' pointed out the manufacturing firm.

"The flowing, left-handed penmanship indicated the telegraph-operator, who uses the key in his right hand while he writes with the other. Nearly all telegraph-operators can write with either hand. The serial number of the passport gave me the true name of the party to whom it had originally been issued, together with the personal description. The West Shore people gave me

additional information. Hardee & Harrison remembered furnishing an artificial leg to a telegraph-operator in the employ of the West Shore Railroad Company; moreover, they had subsequently provided him with a wrench so that he could tighten up the limb in dry weather."

"But the telegrams," I interrupted. "I can't make any sense out of them."

"That's an old commercial dodge," laughed Parr, as he produced the messages. "March, being an operator himself, knew the trick. He didn't want every Tom, Dick and Harry to know his plans. He knew that he had to lay low at times. That's the reason why he fixed up his lodge. It was also a quiet and safe place in which to practise his 'pen-work.' He taught Tilson how to read his messages. Suppose you read the messages word by word, *alternately*, commencing with the last word of the Postal Telegraph message."

Following Parr's instructions, I had no difficulty in reading the complete message, for, coupling the words together, it read:

"Wait—for-me—at—dock—Fulton—Chain—Saturday—night. Train—due—at—six—fifty. Have—boat—good—order—and—lodge—provisioned—for—long stay."

"My time-table told me that the only train due at Fulton Chain at 6:50 P. M. was a local, made up at Saranac Lake, at least a hundred miles north of Fulton Chain. To make connections with that train at a point so far north, my man *must* have been on board of the New York Central train I mentioned."

"There's one point that still puzzles me," I observed, mischievously inclined to compel my man-hunting friend to confess that he did not know everything about this peculiar case.

"And what's that?" asked Parr, without looking up from his task of bandaging the Central Office man's thumb.

"How do you account for the fact that the lightning killed March, while we, who were quite close to him, were stunned but not burned?"

"That's easy," answered Parr. A reverent note in his voice, he concluded: "It's because the same Party who ordered the electrocution saw fit to provide us with rubber boots. Think it over, Clarke."

Major C. J. Ross D.S.O.



by
W. Robert Foran



I MUST confess that of all the picturesque figures it has been my happy lot to meet during the course of my twelve years of world-wandering, none stands out so prominently in my recollections as Major C. J. Ross, member of the British Army and Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, and now an Assistant Game Warden in British East Africa.

I first saw the Major in South Africa, but I got to know him, as few other men know him, while we were both serving the British East African Government. This friendship between us is one, for my own part, which years can not lessen.

Fully six feet in height, with lean and almost gaunt figure, drooping shoulders as the result of years spent in the saddle on the plains, face bronzed and seared with deep lines from exposure to the elements in many countries and climes, Major Ross is a man who catches the eye and holds it. The more you get to know him, the more you like him.

What a history the man has back of his forty-odd years! What a name he has won for himself on the field of battle and in police duties! It seems almost impossible to tell all he has seen, accomplished and endured. Perhaps one day some one will venture to record in book form the many deeds of daring this frail-looking Australian has to his credit. It would be a mighty task, but the result should be worthy of the effort, for I know of no man who has more material to draw upon, vivid true-to-life happenings in a varied career of excitement.

Ross was born in Australia way back in

the seventies or may be the sixties. Emigrating to America when still a boy, he held first one post and then another, until finally he drifted to Canada and enlisted in the world-famous Canadian Mounted Police. He could not have chosen a better school of instruction. The years of hard, open-air life made his muscles as steel. His courage was a byword in this Corps, which boasts of more heroes than any other in the world.

Sometimes, if you can get him into a talkative mood, he will tell you of riding many miles to capture dangerous criminals single-handed. Ross tells you with a smile that he was never known to fail on one of these hazardous undertakings. If you look at his face, you can understand why this is so. It is not easy to get him to talk, but fortunately his record is so well known that it is not a difficult matter to gather material on his life.

CAPTURING BANDITS IN CANADA

I REMEMBER one day when we were in camp together in East Africa—keeping law and order in a new diamond-field rush, which turned out a fizzle—Ross began to talk after dinner of some of his adventures with the gun-men and illicit liquor-men in the northwest of Canada. Never had man a more appreciative nor interested audience. Pipes were suffered to go unlit, lest the striking of a match should break the spell.

He told us of one day capturing a band of four bandits, who were notorious for the number of men they had killed. Ross was sent out with a trooper to capture them

alive if possible. Ye gods! think of it! Two men to capture the four worst men in Canada! The two men rode across the plains for several days until they finally came upon the camp of the bandits.

"We got 'em, sure," ended Ross. Being pressed for further particulars, he reluctantly told us a few details of the capture.

"Our arrival was a surprise," he continued. "I walked into their camp accompanied by my trooper. Neither of us had drawn a gun. Bandits or no bandits, they all know they can't fool the N. W. M. Police. One durned fool drew a gun, but I'm mighty quick with my pea-shooter and winged him. The others submitted, and we brought 'em back to the Chief. It was sure some soft snap, that. The poor devil I had shot was buried where he fell by his comrades. They didn't like doing it, but a six-shooter covering you makes a man do what he's ordered. Leastwise, it always has in my experiences. A Colt gun is sure some good persuader."

There were many other stories he told us that night, but the one I have repeated will give the best idea of the indomitable pluck and will-power of the man. Fearlessness, contempt of personal danger, and an iron will are characteristics which have made Ross successful in all he has undertaken. Yet, although one could not count the number of men who have fallen to his unerring aim in the course of a career tempered with an exacting sense of duty, Ross is a man with a superlatively kind heart.

MORMON REVELATIONS

IT IS only by looking into his eyes and catching the lines of his mouth, hidden partially by a heavy mustache, that one can read that behind this hardened exterior lurks a heart full of kindness for a comrade in distress. Strange to relate, he is a power with women. All women like him, and he himself loves the society of the gentler sex. In the Summer of 1910, Ross was happily married in London and has taken his wife back to East Africa with him. Many a fair lady's heart will be jealous of the woman who has become Mrs. Ross.

One day, when riding together across the Athi Plains, Ross told me that he had spent some years in Utah. I asked him if he was a Mormon.

"Sure thing, young feller. I'm a Bishop

in the Church," he laughed, and the merry twinkle in his eye warned me that a little coaxing might bring out a good story. And presently he told me about his stay in Salt Lake City.

"I gotten run out of there. I misremember what for. The Mormon religion is sure some fine thing. All your wives save up all the yeller-legged chickens to try and coax you to favor them. I don't believe in no Suffragette; Mormon ladies for mine. Say, I guess you better join that outfit. All you gotten to do is to stand up one day in the Tabernacle and announce that you've had a revelation for Sister Jane, and she becomes number five or whatever number is next vacant in your catalogue. I sure had some mighty fine revelations in Salt Lake City. Say, young feller, I'll appoint you a Deacon in the Church."

But somehow I felt I was being "joshed," for the twinkle in Ross's eyes belied his words. But ever after he called me "Deacon." I often wonder whether he told his bride about his Mormon proclivities. I rather fancy he would, for he was not a man to hide a joke, nor to hide a truth. He is the most straightforward, outspoken man on the earth.

FROM INDIAN FIGHTING TO THE BOER WAR

AFTER leaving the North-West Mounted Police, Ross came back to the States and enlisted, after naturalizing, for some Indian campaign. He also fought through the Red River War. His career was varied to a marked degree until the South African War broke out.

Ross joined the Canadian Mounted Rifles and went out to South Africa with them as a trooper. He saw considerable service with them, but eventually got into trouble through an excessive fondness for looting. He was dropped from the force and immediately went to Pretoria and joined another irregular corps as a lieutenant. His wonderful scouting and daring earned for him the notice of Lord Kitchener. As a result of an interview with the great British General, Ross was empowered to raise an irregular corps of cavalry. He called them the Canadian Mounted Scouts. So was born a little corps which wrote its name big in the annals of the greatest war of modern times.

Ross gathered together a number of kin-

dred spirits and soon had a regiment of Scouts which would be hard to equal, let alone beat. They were all men who had traveled the world in search of adventure, men who faced death daily with unflinching eyes, and men who knew no hardship too difficult to endure or overcome. With such material is it to be wondered at that the Canadian Mounted Scouts were soon heard of?

They fought in every part of the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, and Cape Colony. The Boers trembled at the mere mention of the name of Ross. It would take a book to write the history of their deeds of marvelous daring. They used no kid gloves in their warfare, either.

ROSS'S FIFTEEN PRISONERS

PERHAPS the most famous episode in their adventurous exploits was the shooting of fifteen Boer prisoners, whom they had captured when wearing the British uniform. This act was against all usages of modern warfare and in defiance of the acts of the Hague and Geneva; the Boers were liable for their breach of law to be tried by drumhead court-martial, with death as the penalty if found guilty.

Ross is a man of quick action. He had caught the men in the act of the crime and wearing the uniforms. That was enough. He dispensed with the drumhead court-martial and sentenced them to death by shooting. He selected three of his most trusted followers to assist him in the execution of the Boers. Then he sent on the remainder of his regiment, warning them to take no notice of any shooting they might hear in the course of the next few minutes. He waited until they were out of sight and then turned to the cowering Boers.

I wish that I could reproduce the story of the subsequent events with the vivid detail and quaint phraseology used by Ross when telling me the story. He speaks with a drawl and pronounced American accent.

"Say, you Gol-durned dogs," Ross said to them, "I've caught you with the goods on you, and you got to ante up. I'll give you just five minutes to make your peace with your Creator and then I'll pass you out. I guess the good God won't listen to such vermin as you, but I'm game to let you try your hand at it. Step lively now

with them petitions to your 'good Maker!'"

With a revolver in each hand and his three men covering the fifteen prisoners with their guns, Ross counted out the minutes. The Boers had not yet realized that he was in earnest and stood watching him anxiously.

"One more minute and out you get!" Ross snapped at them as he finished counting off four minutes. He stepped toward the first man and held his revolver at the man's head. The Boer cowered back and began to beg for mercy.

"Cut out that woman business!" commanded Ross. "I guess the good God won't listen to you, and, if He won't, you can't expect me to. Time up! Here's where you go to see your God, if he'll see you, which I doubts."

Bang! went the revolver and the man sank dead at the Major's feet. One after the other he sent them on their way into the "Great Unknown." The work completed, Ross and his men mounted their horses and rode at a gallop after their regiment.

The story leaked out, and Ross was sent for by Lord Kitchener at Pretoria. No record of this meeting is obtainable, and Ross will not speak of it. At least his offense did not interfere, later on, with Ross's being appointed a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, which ranks next to the Victoria Cross.

FIELD-GUN PRACTISE

ANOTHER story told about Major Ross, which I happen to know to be true in every detail, is that when riding into Pretoria one morning from an expedition after a Boer Commando, his little column was mistaken for a party of Boers by a British Garrison Artillery battery of 4.7 guns in one of the hills guarding the capital. The shells fell wide and this fact irritated Ross. He left the column in charge of his second-in-command and rode at a gallop toward the hill from which the battery was firing. Oblivious to shot and shell, Ross rode right to the summit of the hill, luckily arriving unscathed.

"Who's the Gol-durned fool in command of this outfit?" he shouted to the astonished gunners.

A young artillery lieutenant came forward and saluted the Major. The senior eyed the younger man sternly.

"That the best practise you and your fools can make?" he inquired with deep disgust. "I'll report you for bad shooting when I get into Pretoria. Maybe the General will let you hear from him. I guess you had better go back to school, young man, for your education's been sadly neglected."

Ross wheeled his horse and clattered down the hill again to rejoin his command. For many a long day the lieutenant will suffer from the gibes of his brother officers, and the men of the battery will probably never recover their self-respect.

Ross came out of the Boer war with a remarkable record behind him and with the undying admiration and friendship of Lord Kitchener and other generals. His is a name to conjure with. The Boers feared him to a marked degree, so much so that when large parties of them came up to East Africa to settle after the war and learned that Ross was an official, they told the Governor that they were afraid to settle in the same country with Ross. But they have learned that the Major in war and the Major in peace are two entirely different people. The East African Boers have long lost all fear of him and now look upon him as their friend and brother.

I think I am correct in saying that Major Ross is the only naturalized American who is a retired Major of the British Army, a Companion of the coveted Distinguished Service Order, and an active official of the British Colonial government service. This alone proves in what high esteem he is held by the British Government.

OUSTED BY THE GERMANS

AFTER the Boer war was over, Ross fought for a time in the Somaliland war of 1902-1904 as an officer with the Boer contingent of Mounted Infantry. Then he came up to East Africa and went on a trading and elephant-hunting trip into German East Africa. His life there is somewhat shrouded in mystery. All I have ever been able to ascertain about it is that he shot a large number of elephants, secured a grant of land, and set up a trading store at one of the German stations, Bukoba, I believe, on the Victoria Lake.

However, he managed to fall afoul of the German authorities, and he was expelled

from the territory and his land confiscated. By all accounts he was very harshly and undeservedly used. When his Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught was visiting East Africa in 1906, Major Ross came to meet him at Kisumu on the Victoria Lake by the Duke's special request. They had a long talk and the Duke promised to take up his case against the German Colony on his return to London.

Shortly afterward, as a result of this meeting, Major Ross was appointed Assistant Game Warden of the East African Protectorate. No more fitting work could have been found for him, and he has earned a great name for his rigid enforcement of the Game Protection Laws. Woe betide the man who is bold enough to break the game regulations, for he will have to answer to Major Ross and the Courts of Justice as sure as his name is what it is.

Day after day Ross rides the plains and game reserves in search of law-breakers. He thinks nothing of covering fifty miles a day, and this on the equator line, armed only with his trusty Colt and a .256 Mannlicher-Schoener rifle. He carries his food and blankets on his saddle and sleeps under a tree, in a native hut or, if lucky, at a farmhouse. He cares nothing for the danger of attack from prowling beasts of the jungle or turbulent natives, or for the hardships of exposure. He spells duty with a very big capital D.

On one occasion, the story goes that he rode by moonlight from Fort Hall in the Kenya district to Nairobi—a distance of sixty-four miles! When about half way, he was held up on the plains by three lions. Ross says that he had much difficulty in keeping his pony's head on to the lions, but eventually the lions tired of stalking him and turned their attentions to some zebra which Ross could hear near by. It wasn't a very pleasant experience, but Ross laughs at it. He calls the three lions in question, "Gol-durned pesty curious critters."

At his house in Nairobi he kept for a long time a tame lion, much to the terror of itinerant natives. He says that it was the best "watch-dog" he ever owned, and claims that when all the other bungalows in his vicinity were favored by burglars, his house escaped attention. Which is not at all surprising under the circumstances.

I think that few men have had more in-

teresting and exciting experiences with big game than Major Ross, yet he will not talk about them, for he is a very modest man, totally unaware of his own sterling qualities. His work carries him continually among the denizens of forest and plain, and few men know the habits and traits of the wild game in "Nature's Zoo" better than Ross.

CELEBRATING THE FOURTH

I FEEL rather like telling tales out of school by narrating the following little story of Ross. It is so typical of the great, big, boyish heart of the man, that I can not refrain from telling it.

It so happened that Ross foregathered with three other Americans in Nairobi to celebrate Independence Day. They had a very lively dinner, and afterward proceeded to loose off steam by firing off a number of crackers and rockets. Tiring of this tame pastime, they started in to turn Nairobi into a "Wild West" town by shooting out the street-lamps from the veranda of the hotel. This sport soon palled, and they went for a walk down-town with the object of seeking new fields of enjoyment. They happened to pass the bank and saw the window open, and a Parsee clerk working at a ledger under a light.

The temptation was too strong for Ross and his three American companions. They lit some of the crackers and threw them into the bank building through the open window. The clerk mistook them for bombs and rushed out, shouting "murder!" The negro constable on the beat blew his whistle for help, and, the barracks being close at hand, soon some twenty dusky policemen responded to the "alarm" call. In the general mix-up, and to avoid arrest for their prank, Ross and his companions roughly handled the policemen and put them to flight.

I happened to be in command of the police at Nairobi and soon came upon the scene in answer, to a telephone call. I arrested the four practical jokers for "disturbing the peace" and "resisting a police officer in the execution of his duty." They were all released on bail, and subsequently stood their trial before the Sessions Judge and a white jury.

The jury, in the face of the weight of evidence, brought in a verdict of not guilty and all were acquitted. Ross made an am-

ple apology to all concerned for his share in the escapade, and laughingly told me that he thought it pretty hard that a good American could not enjoy his national holiday without being arrested.

ROSS AND ROOSEVELT

WHEN Colonel Roosevelt visited East Africa he met Major Ross, and the two men found much in common. At the banquet given in Nairobi to the ex-President, Major Ross was selected to present a Rhinoceros-foot box to the distinguished visitor as a token of regard from the Americans in the colony. In his short speech at the presentation, Major Ross, to every one's keen delight and particularly that of Colonel Roosevelt, repeatedly referred to the famous hunter as "Colonel Rosenfelt." In his reply the Colonel referred to the many years Major Ross had spent in America and particularly in the West, saying that they were both "pretty good Rocky Mountain men."

It is somewhat surprising to think how this man of many weird experiences and continuous adventure has settled down to his official life in East Africa. See him in his spotless white duck Government uniform with his breast glittering with his four orders and medals, and you will hardly credit that this is the man whose reckless daring and quick-handed meting out of justice in the Boer war set all the British army talking.

See him as I have seen him, clad in evening dress at a Government House function, smoking a short pipe, and you may laugh for a moment because he looks like a duck out of water. But you will not laugh long, for you will quickly recognize that here is a MAN. It is because he is preeminently a man that he is a leader among men.

The spirit of the rover of the plains and the seeker after adventures is strong within him, and it is plain to the naked eye. He is no social mimic of civilized customs. He is not polished, his hands are not manicured, his face is not massaged, his clothes are anything but fashionable, but he cares not, and after a few minutes' conversation with him you do not care either.

Again see him playing with children, as I have seen him, laughing and happy, and you will begin to understand that though a man may be quick to snuff out a life when

it is necessary, this does not imply that he is heartless or cruel. No man who can look as Ross looks when he is playing with his little children friends, can be cruel or heartless.

But Ross will tell you that it is sometimes imperative to carry a gun, and if you do so it is essential that you can shoot straight and be quicker on the trigger than the other man. As he once naively told me, "Shoot quick and straight. The last man in gets the full service and won't want no other."

One day the restless spirit within his gaunt, tall, weather-battered frame will bid him pack up his traps and go forth again to fresh adventures. The life is too alluring to be left alone for long. When that spirit moves Ross again, things will happen. Things have a way of happening when he is around.

But for the moment he has settled down to a home life with a wife, and maybe with a son to rear up to follow in his footsteps. But I do not think that he will stay content for long in civilization.



A Pair of Mules

by Nevil G. Henshaw

THEY will still tell you the story at the little village of Bayou Tasse, always with wonder, often with fear, and sometimes with the swift, furtive sign of the cross that is still found among the older French of Louisiana in moments of great awe.

"It was like a stone, m'sieu. Yes, like a stone," they will say, staring out at the smooth waters of the bayou as though they still hope to find their answer there.

IT HAD been a quick job and a neat one—two shots between the eyes with the huge, old-fashioned rifle that the deputy sheriff always carried beneath his saddle-

flap. The animals had scarcely moved, the sick one simply ceasing her short, labored breathing, the well one pitching quickly to her knees.

Now the little crowd of neighbors pressed forward, drawn by the terrible fascination of sudden death, speaking in low voices as they discussed the details of the tragedy.

"It was as though she were at prayer—the well one, when she fell to her knees," whispered Prevost, the cobbler, who, in his spare moments was wont to look after the chapel of the Virgin.

"Behind the ear, that is the better place," insisted Michael, the butcher. "Believe me, I have shot beeves enough to know."

"Had they been mine I could not have allowed it," sighed Lartigue, the planter. "Of course with my animals, it would have been different."

"But when the mayor ordered it you would have had no choice," objected Miron, the baker. "After all, a mule is only a mule."

Beneath a china tree a little back from the crowd, the curé was arguing with Juban, the owner of the slain animals. A great pity for the unfortunate man shone in the eyes of the good priest, as he strove in his quiet, gentle way to explain the justice of the deed.

"Surely you must understand that there was nothing else to do, my son," he kept repeating. "It was charbon, the most terrible, the most contagious of all animal diseases. There was no doubt of the matter. Did not M'sieu Blanc, the veterinary, come all the way from Landry to swear to it before the mayor?"

"It is a terrible misfortune, I know, my son, but you must think of the others. Were not your animals killed and buried, the whole parish might become infected. Instead of one, thousands would be ruined."

"You must be brave. You must be a man, Juban. As you have sacrificed yourself for your neighbors, so will they sacrifice themselves for you. They are kind people. They will not let you starve. God is good, and there are always better days to come."

But Juban shook his head. He was a huge, hairy, wild-looking man, brown and strong from his life in the open, and bearing himself with the quiet alertness of one who has made his living by his gun. In his face alone there was none of the keen watchfulness of the hunter. Here there was only a dazed look of misery—the terrible, dumb misery of the animal that is incapable of expression.

"No, no, *mon père*," he said monotonously, again and again. "It is you who do not understand. For the sick one—that is all right. She would have died anyway. With the well one it was murder. Were I married, had I a child with such a complaint, would they kill it, together with my family and myself? You know that they would not."

"Ah, no, *mon père*. It is the ill will of these neighbors to whom you would have me turn. They hate me since I am not of their kind. *Bien!* They have had their revenge. As for me, I must return to the

coast. My boat is old, my oyster reefs have been picked over. For the present I must gather culls above a rotten keel."

"And you would have me think of better days to come? Believe me, *mon père*, you do not understand."

After it was all over and the neighbors had gone, Juban seated himself beside the pit where the mules had been buried and stared out across it with unseeing eyes. He did not curse. He did not go after the old gun above his fireplace, as some had feared he would do.

Instead, he sat there crushed and silent, looking back into the past, where others would have thought of the future. Slowly, methodically, he returned to the days that were gone, and as he did so, there came into his face an expression almost of surprise. It was a new experience to Juban, for in all the busy years of his life, never before had he found the time for such a thing.



BORN in a hunting camp far down upon the lower coast, of parents who had deserted him at birth, Juban had been alone from the first. Looking back upon it now, he saw that he owed his survival solely to his eagerness and willingness to fight. Always he had fought for food, for clothing, for shelter—everything.

Life in a hunting camp is hard at best, and Juban's single-handed struggle had been a terrible one. Often, in times of famine, he had snatched his food from the very mouth of a larger child, bolting it quickly between blows, accepting his beating with the silent courage that is born of necessity. When he became older and went out upon the marsh he had been forced to contest each bird, each skin, against the greediness of his companions. His very hut had been built gun in hand, upon a wretched bog that had become valuable only through his desire to use it.

Yet Juban had kept on, hanging grimly to his life for some reason which he could not explain. Perhaps he had wished to spite his companions. Perhaps it had been the courage that had made the struggle possible. Even now he could not say.

Had he known the uses of money, Juban might even have become prosperous. Hated by his companions, hating them in return, he had gone his way alone, free from any distraction in his calling. Thus he had become an expert in the ways of game, the

setting of traps, the best spots for fish in the Bay Vermillion.

Always were his birds the finest, his skins the most perfect, his fish the best of their kind. In the villages of the mainland he could have found the highest prices for his wares, but these were markets unknown to Juban.

Instead, he sold his game at a larger, more prosperous camp, higher up the coast, knowing nothing of the profits that were made, feeling content that he was able to keep himself alive. Of pleasures he was ignorant. The cards, the liquor of his companions did not tempt him. These men were fools if not worse, he told himself. Therefore their amusements must be foolish also.

One Winter when times were unusually hard at the larger camp Juban found himself unable to sell his game. At first he was furious, thinking that he had been refused through spite. Later, seeing others meet with the same misfortune, he followed them up the coast, hoping in a vague way that through them he might find a solution to his difficulty.

Just before sunset Juban rowed out of the sea marsh and followed the others over a bar and into a cup-shaped sheet of water. Around the edges of the cup grew grass and trees such as Juban had never seen, and scattered about among the shadows was the little, straggling village that was very properly named Bayou Tasse.

By dark Juban had sold his boatload for an amount of which he had never dreamed. Also, the storekeeper with whom he bargained had treated him with an unknown kindness. He had spoken to him as to a friend. He had ended by inviting him to spend the night at his home.

It had blown up very cold at sunset, and Juban's boat was only an open skiff, devoid of shelter. Also, until his companions returned in the morning, he would be unable to find his way home. Juban accepted the storekeeper's invitation and spent the night in the first real house of his experience.

Next morning before he left, the storekeeper took his guest about the little farm that was his pride. They were plowing late that year, and the scent of the rich black earth rose up into Juban's nostrils like an incense. The very chickens of the farmyard were kind to him, gathering about him in a clucking throng. The sun shone warm and bright, and about the little front porch

of the house there were blooming flowers.



THAT afternoon when he tied his boat before his battered hut, Juban was a different man. The change had come slowly, but it had effectually shattered the bleak little world of his former years.

Always he had imagined that there was no other world save this one of his own—the bare, dreary marshes, the glistening mud flats, the cold, white oyster reefs, the empty, tumbled waters of the bay. Now he knew that there was a different, better world, a world of sunshine and of flowers, of ich, sweet-scented earth, and snug, white houses with women and children at the doors.

At last Juban had an ambition. Before, like an animal, he had sought only to live. Now he had something to live for.

All that year Juban struggled toward his desire. He hunted, he trapped, as he had never hunted or trapped before. Then, finding that there was usually an abundance of game in the villages of the coast, he confined himself to the selling of oysters, buying a little lugger with his savings, that he might carry the greater load.

By Summer Juban had managed to make the first payment upon a little strip of land at Bayou Tasse. Here he built a tiny cabin, putting it up plank by plank, as he waited between his expeditions for the tide that would enable him to cross the bar at the bayou's mouth.

By Fall Juban had bought and paid for a pair of mules. After this he drew his lugger up on the beach and set about the preparations for his coming crop.

The people of the village were kind. They came to Juban daily with offers of help and advice and, had they been able to understand him, all might have been well. But Juban could not change the habits of a lifetime in a single month. Forced from a child to fight each inch of his way, distrustful and suspicious of every one, he followed his visitors sullenly about his little farm, watching them closely, with the savage, snarling watchfulness of a poaching dog.

In the end the village folk abandoned him entirely, leaving him to go his way alone.

"He is a beast," they said. "At all events his failure will benefit us, since he will then be forced to return to the coast where he belongs."

Thus, as they had predicted, Juban failed

the first year. Due to his ignorance, his crop was poor. He did not gather it in time. Only through stinting himself to the verge of starvation was he enabled to make the second payment upon his land.

But Juban was not discouraged. He was used to such failures. He still had his mules, and he had made enough seed for another crop. Next year—that would be the time. He would show his neighbors then.

And now his neighbors had shown him. His mules were dead. His Fall plowing was but partly done. He was a ruined man.

Slowly Juban rose from beside the pit, and shook himself like a man coming out of a deep sleep. Yes, it was over—this dream of happiness of his. Now he must caulk his leaky lugger and return to the coast—to the marshes, the water, and the cruel reefs, of which he had imagined himself free.

Then there would be his home-coming, cold, wet and weary, while the snug houses about the edge of the cup would wink their windows in the sunlight, as though to mock him in his misery.

A great dull rage began to burn in the heart of Juban, and little black specks danced before his eyes. Had he been able to encompass the lives of his neighbors into a single throat he would gladly have strangled it with one hand.

II

JUBAN found the boat upon the southern edge of the Point La Chut, shortly after he had raked the last of his oysters. It lay half-hidden in the sea marsh, just as the tide had left it, a battered, leaky dory with a half-obliterated name upon its stern. In the bow a single man lay face downward, one arm still bent about a thwart, as though locked there by the fury of the convulsion that had been his end.

Most men would have fled in terror from such a sight, but Juban only forced his lugger alongside. Through what he had considered a misfortune, he was immune. Alone and helpless, he had fought his way through an attack of yellow fever three years before.

Seating himself in the stern of the dory, Juban stared out across the sea marsh, as he thought of the fate of the man at his feet:

A fever ship, a South American most probably, wallowing helplessly far out upon

the waters of the Gulf. A group of terrified, panic-stricken sailors rowing madly away in the crowded dory, casting fearful backward glances toward the ones that they had left behind. Then the quick, merciless course of the fever, the dull splashes over-side, until the lone passenger had swept through the Pass, into the marshes of the Bay Vermillion.

"*Dieu!*" said Juban, speaking his thoughts aloud. "Like myself, you have been ruined by a disease, my friend. Only in your case you have had the satisfaction of seeing your neighbors go before you."

Juban paused as a thought came to him. He rose to his feet and shook a fist toward the far-distant mainland, and at that moment his face was terrible to see.

It was late September and the weather was warm. There would be no frost for more than a month. If by disease he had been ruined, here was a chance to pay back his neighbors in their own coin.

Juban knew nothing of the theory of mosquitoes that was later to conquer the scourge. If one came in contact with the fever, one became infected, and lived or died according to his fate. It was the invariable rule.

A moment Juban paused, while in his eyes was a hate of all mankind.

"*Bien,*" said he, and, lifting the body of the sailor, he laid it upon his mound of oysters, that rose above the lugger like a rough, white grave.



PROMPTLY at half-past eleven the following morning, Juban swung into the last reach of sea marsh that separated him from Bayou Tasse. If anything, he had been regular in his expeditions—an afternoon for his going out, a day for his raking, the departure at sunrise, that would bring him to the bar with the last of the water at twelve o'clock. His neighbors could have set their watches by his arrival.

Just before Juban reached the bar he sighted Martlette, the fisherman, going out for his afternoon catch. Half of the lower coast as Martlette was, Juban had sometimes been friendly with him, so now as the fisherman passed he called in greeting.

"*Hola, Juban!*" he cried. "You must hurry and get in. They have something to show you there at the village. Something that will cause you to feel more contented."

But Juban did not reply. With burning

eyes and shaking hands he put about and scraped over the bar with the last of the ebbing tide.

One glance of triumph Juban cast toward the little village about the edge of the cup, a glance as merciless as his invisible destroyer. Slowly he clenched and raised a hand, a curse upon his lips, and then he paused uncertainly at the sight that met his gaze.

For gathered upon the village street, as though in greeting, were all his neighbors. There were the curé, the deputy sheriff, Prevost the cobbler, Michael the butcher—every one. Back of the crowd and held by two men were a pair of mules—a pair of fine, fat mules, with curious markings. Juban knew those mules well, if only through his desire for them. They belonged to Lartigue, the planter, and were considered the finest in all the parish.

A moment Juban gazed in amazement and, as he did so, the words of Martlette, the fisherman, came back to him:

"You must hurry and get in," he had said. "They have something to show you there at the village. Something that will cause you to feel more contented."

Suddenly Juban understood, cringing down to the deck of his lugger like a stray cur that has been overcome by a word of kindness.

The curé had been right. He had misjudged his neighbors. They had felt sorry for him, after all. Nay, more—they were about to make a restitution. In place of the mules that he had lost, they were going to present him with the finest pair in all the parish.

There could be no doubt of the matter. There was the crowd at his very landing, where they had gathered at the well-known hour of his return. They had even told Martlette that he might prepare him.

If only the fisherman had said more! If only he had asked a question as any other man would have done!

Now it was too late. All night had the dead sailor lain upon the mound of oysters. The sun shone warm. The wind was blowing in from the bay, to scatter the seeds of the destroyer far and wide. Until high tide,

at sunset, the lugger with her ghastly cargo would be locked fast within the cup-like harbor of Bayou Tasse.

Juban passed a shaking hand across his face. There were tears in his eyes at this, the first real kindness that he had ever known. The pain at his heart was fiercer than it had been at the greatest cruelty he had ever endured.

"*Dieu!*" he whispered hoarsely. "What have I done? What can I do?"

Then, as suddenly as he had understood, Juban saw the way. The waters of the bayou were cool and deep. The seams of his lugger were but newly caulked, and his load was a heavy one. Perhaps if he acted quickly it might not yet be too late.

His clothes were infected also, it was true, but that made no difference. It would be well worth while, if only he were in time.

Dropping down into his little cabin Juban seized an oyster knife and feverishly attacked the oakum in the seams of the floor. A thin line of water rewarded his efforts, spurting merrily upward for an inch or so to drop back into a sluggish pool upon the dusty boards.

But Juban was not satisfied.

"It is too slow. By then I will be too close inshore," he muttered impatiently, as he reached for the ax above his bunk.



AND so they still marvel at Bayou Tasse.

"Yes, m'sieu, it was like a stone—out there in the deepest part," they will tell you. "One moment there was the lugger with its load. The next it was gone. It could not have been the newly caulked seams, as some thought. It was too quick. Also in such an event Juban would have had time to swim ashore."

"Had he done so he would have seen that which would have pleased him, since those in misfortune are always happy for company. At the very moment we were all upon the street leading the mules of Lartigue to a suitable spot for execution. They, too, had been taken with charbon, and we were forced to shoot them, despite the fact that they were the finest in all the parish."



The Day of All Fools

A Sir John Hawkwood Story



by Marion
Polk
Angellotti

IN THE now far distant days of my boyhood, when it was my dearest hope to become a soldier and my bitterest dread that I must needs be a tanner in the end, I remember I was wont to fancy that a successful general was more a god than a mortal. It was an absurd, romantic idea enough, this, the view-point of a self-willed angry lad held to a trade he hated by a father as stubborn as himself; but I have found that a good part of the world is of the same mind.

Let a man become a famous leader and the great will bow down to him, talk of him with bated breath, picture him an invincible being who knows only glory and triumph. Never was there greater delusion, for, let a general be as able as he may, at times he must fail most ludicrously and cut as foolish a figure as the least of those who envy him. Such has been my lot oftener than I care to count; but I think that never did I show to poorer advantage than in one affair which occurred—very appropriately, as my Irish lieutenant Michael O'Meara pointed out to me with his usual impertinence—on the

festival commonly known as the Feast of Fools.

We had kept the day in a fashion quite devoid of good cheer, lying in the mist before the Duke of Milan's strong city of Pavia and listening for the betterment of our tempers to the gibes of the sentinels on the walls, as we had now done for full two months. At present I was in the service of Gonzaga of Mantua; but I was prepared to swear by all I held sacred that our alliance would end abruptly as soon as the time named in the bargain could come around.

He had no more conception of the rules of warfare than the veriest child, this prince, yet he must needs decide everything himself. Instead of letting me keep my White Company together and conquer the hostile country step by step, he was forever compelling me to divide it and scatter it in useless spots; which explains why I was now besieging Pavia with so small a force that time and hunger were my only hopes, and living in a camp of unoccupied, unruly followers who provided me with a sort of inferno into which to plunge daily for the

agreeable task of restoring some pretense at order. All things considered, had I not possessed a hearty contempt for the soldier who evades his bargain, I would certainly have flung up my command long since, and sought service elsewhere.

Moreover, I had another cause for worry. Shut up in Pavia was the great Milanese general, Jacopo dal Verme, an old rival of mine, whom it would have afforded me particular gratification to take prisoner. At least, he should have been shut up there; but as time went on I began to have a lively suspicion that he had evolved some way of getting in and out at his pleasure, though how I guessed this heaven knows, unless by means of the sixth sense which a born general possesses.

Well, I was not deceived, for I soon learned from a division of my men engaged in besieging the near-by town of Asti that they had actually seen Dal Verme on the walls of that place, though how he could have entered they had not an idea. Neither could I imagine how he had left Pavia, unless there was treachery in my camp, and I took to making midnight sorties from my tent and going the rounds with a view to catching my rogues napping. But no success attended me, and I was well-nigh discouraged when something occurred which cheered me considerably.



JACOPO DAL VERME was of anything but an even disposition. He would have quarreled with an angel; and in the present case he did what was far more to my purpose—quarreled with a certain Gaudenzio Vivaldi, the Milanese governor of Pavia, and accused him openly of having proved himself both treacherous and dishonest. So far as I knew, the charge was quite unfounded, but it had a most satisfactory result for me.

Vivaldi was a man of bitter passions, little inclined to accept disgrace without getting revenge on his traducer, and before four and twenty hours had passed a fellow in his employ had slipped out of Pavia under the nose of a slumbering sentry, penetrated to my camp and my presence, and informed me that his master was prepared to deliver the city into my hands.

I accepted this offer with something like enthusiasm, and the envoy went away declaring that all should be arranged at once. A day passed, and another day, and not a

syllable reached me. Plainly something had gone amiss and brought the plan to an untimely end. All this being as it was, perhaps nobody need wonder at my being somewhat out of temper that cold evening as I sat in my tent playing at cards with O'Meara, who tried me almost beyond bearing by insisting that all was sure to come out well, a point of view with which I emphatically disagreed.

"Make yourself easy, Sir John dear," was his aggravating exhortation, as he sipped his wine and mocked me with merry blue eyes. "Sure and when things are at their worst is the very time they must be after mending—many's the wise man has said as much before I let fall the jewel of truth to comfort you——"

"So far as I can see," I broke in savagely, "we are likely to stop here before Pavia the rest of our lives. Never again do I fight for a prince who ties my hands and then bids me work miracles; for a miracle it would be should I succeed!"

Michael assumed a sphinxlike air of mystery which made me curious in spite of myself.

"Maybe not," he drawled. "Maybe you'll be after finding your salvation not in an act of hivin, but in a certain precious lieutenant of yours, one who has eyes in his head and takes no shame to use them." He stretched his arms with a great yawn. "Listen now, Sir John! Suppose—just suppose, mind, for the pure joy of fancying as much—that Messer Jacopo came burrowing out of Pavia like the old fox he is once too often, and I should catch him and give him into your hands? What would you be saying then?"

This startling supposition brought me out of my chair with a bound.

"What is it you have discovered, Michael?" I cried. "Have you learned how Dal Verme gets out of the city?"

"Divil a bit," he hastened to assure me. "I was just wishful to cheer you a bit, no more. And for the moment I made you happy as a king, to judge from how you left your seat."

On the very point of laughing, I forced a scowl.

"Oh, talk like a man of sense for once, if it lies in your power," I said sulkily. "I am not in a humor for foolery to-night," and I was sitting down to resume our game when there came from without a sudden sharp,

shrill outcry that cut the air like a knife—unmistakably the voice of a woman!

In an instant we had reached the door, overturning cards and table as we went. There was a great fire blazing in the open space before us, and by its red glow we saw a circle of laughing troopers, and in their midst a slender figure striving hard to break a way through.



IT WAS in the part of my life I like least to remember, this, before I had looked on the face of the lady who was to waken me again to the meaning of true knighthood; but at my worst I had never fallen so low that a cry of terror from a woman left me unmoved. As the sound still echoed I flung myself out of my tent, sprang across the intervening space, and invading the circle began to deal right and left blows which, taking the recipients entirely unaware, sent them over like so many ninepins.

"What deviltry are you about now, you rogues?" I cried fiercely, as I paused for want of breath. "Are you anxious to be lashed from end to end of the camp, that you dare bring such diversions into my very presence?"

To this inquiry no one ventured to respond, and as the prostrate troopers began to scramble sheepishly to their feet I turned toward the woman. The sight of her wrung from me an exclamation of surprise. She was panting for pure terror, and her face, looking out from a dark hood, was white as death, but she was a very young girl and extremely beautiful, and from her bearing I could have sworn that she came of a good house.

"Well, mistress, and what is it you desire here?" I asked somewhat grimly. "And do you not know that a camp is scarce the place for ladies of your sort to come unattended unless they want rough usage?"

She cast a wild look at the troopers, seized my arm, and clung to it as to her sole hope in life.

"The saints protect me!" she moaned. "Are you Sir John Hawkwood?" Then, at my nod: "Ah, take me to your tent, let me have speech with you! Listen, Sir John—I am Gaudenzio Vivaldi's daughter, and I have come to give you Pavia!"

I stood staring at her for a moment, unable to believe my ears. Then I led the way to my tent and we entered, O'Meara

following us in and drawing the curtains behind us.

"Sit down, Madonna, and revive yourself with wine," I said, pushing forward a chair, "and then tell me the meaning of this riddle, for I must confess I am as mystified as ever I was yet."

The girl was struggling for calm in a way that roused my admiration.

"Sit! Taste wine!" she mocked fiercely, as she got her breath. "Do you think I have come here to make merry with you, Sir John Hawkwood?"

"As to that, Madonna, you know best," I answered with a shrug, "for I have already informed you that the purport of your visit is beyond me."

"If I could I would never taste wine again!" she said in a low, passionate voice. The sound made me start; I had heard strong men speak so when half mad with hate, but never a woman. "What is there left on earth for me? My father is dying, poisoned by this Dal Verme, this monster who, not content with his disgrace, must have his life as well! Yes, and he is dying slowly, turning, twisting for very anguish!" She clasped her hands and wrung them, but her eyes were dry and angry. "Yet by the Virgin he shall not die unavenged! Dal Verme, too, shall know bitterness, shall be your prisoner and march at your stirrup! Do you understand me now?"

"None too well," I admitted. Her news had been a shock to me, though I was, on the whole, inclined to think that old Vivaldi was getting nothing but his just deserts; for while at times I must needs make use of men who betray their rulers, I entertained no very high opinion of them. "Come, be a bit plainer. If your father is, as I grieve to hear, on the point of seeking a better world, what chance do I stand of besting Messer Jacopo?"

Vivaldi's daughter was crouching back against the tent. "But one thing is needful," she said tensely. "The plan is perfected—you have but to see my father and learn from him how to play your part tomorrow. Come into Pavia with me, then, and hasten, or it will be too late!"

"Aye, go into Pavia, Sir John!" commented Michael in an undertone. "'Tis a simple thing, that. Never mind the sentinels and Messer Jacopo at all, at all, but just walk in unconcerned-like and take the town!"

The girl's sharp ears had caught the aside.

"Indeed, indeed there is no danger!" she urged, confronting me with clasped hands. "The captain at the Porta Nuova is my father's man; he will let us pass in unchallenged. Do you doubt my truth? Surely you can not do that, when I, Vivaldi's daughter, have trusted myself alone, at night, in this camp of horror, only to get your help in my revenge!"

"Sure, and there's a deal of sinse in what you say, Madonna, and I ask your pardon," O'Meara observed gallantly. "Come, 'tis mesilf will go with you and bring Sir John back any tidings your father may be wishful to impart."

"You will do nothing of the kind," I informed him promptly. "In matters as serious as this I act for myself, as you know perfectly well, and your part in the business will be to stop here and watch the camp."



MY DECISION had a most dampening effect upon Michael, who at once began to indulge in forebodings that would never have occurred to him had he been the man going into peril.

"Now in the name of hivin, Sir John, consider what you do," he urged darkly. "To me the matter has the look of a plot. And even should all prove fair and honest, which I misdoubt, who can tell but Messer Jacopo might chance to be strolling through the streets and encounter you as you pass? The blessid saints send you a pale glimmer of reason, then! Sure and any man with a mind could see that the only fit person to go is mesilf. Now wirra! wirra!"

He broke off with a wail of despair as I buckled on my sword-belt and flung a cloak across my shoulders.

"You talk, you chatter, and my father dies!" the girl moaned in a sort of furious desperation.

I composedly pulled my hat down about my face.

"In heaven's name, Michael, hold your tongue, or Dal Verme's men will hear you inside the walls," I said to O'Meara, who had recommenced his lamentations. "To be sure there is danger, but how long should I gain my bread at soldiering if I turned cautious, do you think? As for a plot, look at the girl there and see if you fancy she plays a comedy! Now, Madonna, as you say, we have chattered enough. Lead me on

your pleasure-jaunt, and remember as you guide me that we shall both get a short shrift if we fall into Dal Verme's hands!"

"It is nothing to me whether I live or die. Oh, my father, my father!" she moaned drearily, gliding out of the tent without a backward glance.

"Good luck to ye, Sir John, if go you will," said O'Meara, with apathetic resignation. "And I'm none so sure but what ye may win Pavia yet with this foolery—for if iver a man had the head of a goose on his shoulders 'tis yourself; and didn't a goose once save Rome?"

II



HAD there been a moon that night Gaudenzio Vivaldi's daughter could never have led me up to Pavia without detection, for the walls were fairly lined with parties of sentinels. As it was, she glided through the pitchy darkness with the silent speed of one who knew her route well, and though I stumbled after her a good deal more noisily we approached the town without having, apparently, attracted the least notice. Now we were so close that I could well-nigh make out the faces of those who watched under the blazing beacons. The dark mass of the ramparts loomed up before us—another moment and we would be at the Porta Nuova, where we were to attempt an entrance.

Treading as lightly as I could, I tried to fix my mind on the perils before me. To go quite unattended into a hostile city where my foes would ask no better fortune than to cut me to pieces, to put myself in the power of my old enemy Dal Verme with not even a disguise to hide me, was an undertaking to try the stoutest nerves.

Frankly I admitted that the chances were all against me. The captain at the Porta Nuova might have been superseded by some one else; moreover, even if we got safely within we need not flatter ourselves that our danger was over, since it was more than likely that Dal Verme was keeping a sharp watch on Vivaldi's house. Notwithstanding all this, I was far from experiencing any desire to turn back.

Try as I might to weigh my danger calmly, my thoughts persisted in leaving it and racing off to the bedside of old Vivaldi; and my chief concern was lest we might arrive too late and find him dead with his plan for

the morrow unrevealed. We hastened on.

The girl had ignored me utterly throughout our passage from camp to town. It was plain that she cared nothing about me save as a tool to be used against her foe, and that apart from that deadly purpose she did not set either of our lives at a pin's fee. Well, by so doing she spared me at least one fear, that of her treachery, for utter anguish and torment are not things to be mistaken, and if ever woman showed these emotions in her face Vivaldi's daughter had done so when she confronted me.

As the dark height of the Porta Nuova loomed over us she turned toward me for the first time and put her fingers on my arm.

"Be quiet," she breathed tensely, "for if an alarm is given we are lost. Ah, praise heaven, Guido is still here, and we have not anything to dread from him and his party; they are for my father, heart and soul!"

The entrance proved so simple a matter that I rubbed my eyes and wondered if I were not dreaming. A whispered word from the girl to a scarred, grizzled veteran who was plainly the captain of the gate, a giving back of armored men who cast one curious glance at my muffled figure and then looked away hastily as if to pretend even to themselves that they had not noted my passing—and we were in Pavia, with scarce a sound to witness our invasion!

I shrugged my shoulders as my guide and I entered a dark, narrow street inside the walls. On the whole, it appeared to me, a much simpler way of managing this affair would have been a charge at the head of my entire force, with the accommodating guards of the Porta Nuova on the watch to let me enter and seize the town before ever it dreamed of my coming.

"Our house, Sir John," the girl's whisper broke in on my ruminations. "Ah, what if Messer Jacopo's men are watching us? Or what if my father is already dead?"

Her voice broke as she paused in the shadow of a great stone building, put out a hand, and struck it softly against a door built into the wall. Apparently we were awaited, for it swung open, and she slipped into its shelter with me following at her heels.

 WE WERE now, I supposed, in a passage, but I could certainly not have sworn as much, for it was pitch-black. I could hear the breathing of

some one who had admitted us, and had the need for haste not been so urgent I would have dallied long enough to ask him what on earth prevented him from lighting us on our way with a torch. The girl concerned herself with no such trifles.

"Pietro, does he live still? Are we in time?" she was asking in a sobbing whisper, and I held my breath for the answer, being by no means anxious to find that I had taken my extraordinary and perilous jaunt for nothing.

"Yes, yes, Madonna, he lives," the man at my elbow muttered soothingly. "But hasten, for it is very sure that he can not bear these torments an hour longer!"

Vivaldi's daughter gave a choked cry, caught my hand, and pulled me forward. Together we stumbled down what appeared to be a long corridor, while I cursed the lack of light in an undertone, and, though far from anticipating any treachery, kept my fingers on my sword-hilt from habit and instinct.

At last we halted. The girl opened a door and led me up a flight of steps, illuminated, to my relief, by a single flickering torch, and ending in a wide gallery lined with rooms, one of which no doubt sheltered the ill and dying gentleman I sought.

"He is yonder, Sir John," cried the girl. "Go in, go in, and plan to crush Jacopo dal Verme, to tread upon him and stamp him into the dust!"

She motioned me toward a doorway, and with a noisy sigh of satisfaction at being done with all this mummary I passed her and entered. Three steps across the threshold I halted with an exclamation of annoyance.

What under heaven was a dying man doing in an unlighted room, and what possessed this family to dispense with things as useful as candles? Strain my eyes as I would, not a single object could I make out in the pitchy darkness.

"By your leave, Madonna," I said rather shortly, with my head half turned back, "I would have one of your lackeys light this place before our conference begins."

My answer was a sharp sound that could have been nothing save the abrupt closing of a door. I wheeled about—the lighted aperture behind me had vanished! Bewildered, I flung myself forward, and felt my outstretched hands touch a smooth oaken

surface, solid and firm to the touch.

"Madonna," I cried, "are you there?"

Outside a heavy bolt shot into place, and over the sound of its thud rose a burst of mocking, triumphant laughter.

"Does Gaudenzio Vivaldi's hospitality please you, Sir John Hawkwood?" cried the girl's voice through her horrible mirth. "Wait, then, do but wait a little! Very soon it will please you better yet!"

III

 TO PUT a soldier in a position of great peril and leave him there helpless, unable to lift a finger to aid himself, or indeed to do anything save wait, is the refinement of torture. My captors evidently understood this to the full, for it was the plan they now followed in dealing with me, and I had the doubtful pleasure of passing a full hour with no company but my own.

When the girl's laughter had died and the sound of departing footsteps told me that I was being left, for the present at least, to my own devices, I stood stock still for a considerable time, too dazed even to move. Then, by degrees, I recovered myself, and the first thing I did was to make a groping circuit of the entire room, with a view to discovering whether I had the place to myself or had been shut up with a couple of armed men entrusted with the task of ending me.

However, it seemed I was safe from this menace; and when finally I stumbled and fell forward across a great couch heaped with cushions, I was sufficiently reassured to feel that I might as well remain where I had dropped and be comfortable in body if not in mind.

One thing was very plain—it was useless to try to understand what had befallen me. I had better call myself a fool for having run my head into a noose, and let it go at that. All these mysteries would be solved in due time; and meanwhile, though it was more than likely that Jacopo dal Verme would hang me to-morrow morning, I was not going to concern myself overmuch till I saw the gallows.

Above all, I was determined to keep my head and not let my courage be squeezed out of me by this extraordinarily unpleasant sojourn in the dark. With such reflections as these I succeeded in heartening myself

more or less; but I did not deny, even to myself, that I would have given all the gold I ever hoped to own could I have got word of my plight to O'Meara and bidden him try the result of a desperate attack on the gates.

The hour had dragged itself to a reluctant close, and I was beginning to feel that in a little more time I should go out of my mind and begin to gibber like any idiot, when the sound of quick, firm steps in the gallery made my heart skip a beat.

Some one halted without, then there was a tapping of fingers on the oak, and one of the upper door-panels slipped smoothly downward, leaving a lighted aperture against which showed the head of a man. This much I saw, and no more, for at this moment of all others, when I should have most realized my desperate peril, a demon of perversity entered into me.

Here was somebody who wanted to appear before me in dramatic fashion and enjoy my discomfiture. Well, he should not be gratified. I let my lids fall, relaxed my every limb, and lay breathing heavily on the couch, like a man to whom a clear conscience has given the boon of dreamless sleep.

"Well, Sir John Hawkwood, and do you find it to your fancy, this poor house of mine?"

I had looked to hear the sharp grating voice of Jacopo dal Verme break the silence, and these soft, malicious tones were a surprise to me. Who was speaking, then? I had not an idea. However, I made no response save to a little increase the noisiness of my breathing, and after a moment the man outside, irritated and excited, spoke again.

"Do you hear me, Sir John?" he asked softly. "Surely you have not become hard of hearing in the past hour? Or are you perhaps so frightened that you can not answer?"

If he had thought to provoke me into speech by this taunt, he was doomed to be disappointed. I continued to lie motionless, and when he spoke for the third time I had the satisfaction of noting a tone of alarm in his voice.

"Saints! has the man flown through a bolted door and escaped? Where is he?" And then, after a brief pause, "Here, Pietro, thrust a torch through this hole, let us have a bit of light to tell us where he is hidden!"

 I GAVE Pietro a minute or more to obey the command. Then, judging that the light would now be playing over my figure, I let my mouth fall open in the stupidest fashion possible, and began to snore so loudly that I woke the echoes.

"Now heaven pity the man!" cried my captor, in tones of exasperation that were sweet hearing to me. "Watch him, sleeping there like a fool, when for aught he knows he may have but an hour longer to live! Sir John! Sir John Hawkwood!"

He had raised his voice to a bellow, and, judging that I had sufficiently shattered his complacency, I stirred, stretched my arms above my head, and opened my eyes.

"Eh? What is it?" I muttered sleepily, as I measured my captor for the first time. To the best of my recollection I had never set eyes on him before. He was an old man with very black brows and a shock of white hair, and his sneering expression impressed me in a way far from favorable. "Ah, now I remember," I said briskly, sitting upright. "Well, my friend, what do you desire, that you so unceremoniously break my rest? And may I perhaps ask who you are, since I think we have never met?"

He looked anything but pleased at my coolness; no doubt he had expected to find me a bit cowed by my hour in the dark.

"Assuredly, Sir John," he answered, with a sour smile. "We are old friends, for though it is true that we have not come face to face until now, we have had considerable dealing together. I am Gaudenzio Vivaldi, at your service—the man who was to give Pavia into your hands!"

Though somewhat startled at this information, I looked unconcerned and continued to sit placidly on the edge of the couch.

"Ah, to be sure," I commented, yawning. "Let me congratulate you upon your recovery—I had understood you were at death's door, whereas I now perceive with pleasure that you are enjoying the best of health."

Old Vivaldi broke into a fit of sneering laughter that made me long to get my fingers on his throat.

"Ah, Sir John, Sir John," he chuckled at last, still very mirthful, "you are undoubtedly a good general, but if you will permit me to say so you are not at all in your element when a question of scheming arises!

I would wager all my lands, for instance, that you have as yet no idea of what has befallen you. Though you have had an hour in which to reflect, you have not even dimly perceived that Jacopo dal Verme and myself are not only the best of friends but also active allies, and that our so bitter quarrel was feigned for the benefit of no other than yourself! No, yours is certainly not a subtle mind, whatever more excellent qualities it may possess! Do you understand at last? I am not accustomed, I admit, to talking with persons who require so much explanation, but if all is not clear to you I will dwell with pleasure on any point you care to name!"

Oh, I understood him, no doubt of that! Fury, partly against him, but more against myself, came near to choking me as I listened, but I had no mind to let him perceive as much.

"Since you are so amiable," I agreed, "there is indeed something that still perplexes me. I can quite understand the part played by gentry like you and your general in this shrewd, not to say knavish, scheme. But the girl who came into my camp—how dared she face such peril even for the sake of her city?"

Vivaldi smirked in a patronizing fashion.

"It is very simple, that," he answered. "You speak of my daughter, who would gladly die to accomplish your ruin. No doubt you saw that she was near mad with hate and bitterness? Well, she cherishes these emotions not against Messer Jacopo, our very good friend, but against your worthy self. Do you ask why? Then I must tell you that she was the betrothed of young Stefano del Marzi, and that her heart broke when he died!"



NOW, indeed, all was plain to me with a vengeance. Stefano del Marzi was a young Milanese of good birth who had chosen to enter my camp in disguise, to take service with me, and after rising rapidly in my confidence through his many brilliant qualities, to sell my secrets to Jacopo dal Verme. At last his treason had been discovered, and he had paid its price, debonairly enough I must admit, by a short shrift and a death at the end of a rope. Small wonder, then, that his betrothed hated me with all her heart!

"She is a brave girl, this daughter of yours," I told Vivaldi, not without admira-

tion. "Let us trust her heart will mend now she has got her vengeance. But to return to my own affairs, why is not Messer Jacopo here in person to gloat over my capture? And, most interesting of all, what are you going to do with me now you have got me in your toils?"

I flatter myself I asked the last question with some unconcern, for Messer Gaudenzio scowled angrily, though he at once covered up his bad temper with a charming smile.

"Messer Jacopo dal Verme," he informed me suavely, "is expected from Asti every moment, and will find your presence in my house the best of cordials after his ride. By the way, Sir John, were you aware that he has gone in and out of Pavia at his own fancy for some weeks past? You are not infallible as a general after all.

"For the rest of your inquiry—surely, dull as you seem, you must have guessed the answer? Pray what should we do with one who has worked our duchy so much evil? Recall how you served young Del Marzi; see if that thought assists your wits. At this very moment there is being erected in our market-place a gallows designed for your entertainment, and at dawn you will be set to dangle from it, with all the city for audience!"

"It is a far cry from now until morning. You would do better to hang me to-night," I rejoined, with an assurance I was far from feeling. "However, the matter is for your own deciding. If you choose to dally here until my men get wind of my peril and come to aid me, I shall certainly not say you nay. Why, listen to the bedlam below-stairs! Did I not foretell it? You have delayed too long, my friend, and must now find other food for your gallows—it is a rescue, as I live!"

There was indeed a wild tumult going on below, a pounding on some distant door, a sound of feet and voices. To be sure, I had in reality no idea that it was a diversion likely to prove helpful to me; I was in fact convinced that it was Messer Jacopo arriving from Asti to enjoy the spectacle of my discomfiture, and my words were but a bit of practise in the bravado I should need to use with him. The event, however, proved that I had spoken like one inspired, for scarce another minute had passed when the invaders burst into the lower hall, and I heard, high and clear above all the turmoil, a voice crying my name.

"Sir John! Sir John Hawkwood! Is it here you are? Never say die, then—sure and we'll have you safe in a moment, no more!"



WELL, either my danger had quite unhinged my mind, or the man speaking was Michael O'Meara; and never had I been better pleased to hear his voice. For the first time I left the couch and advanced toward the door, from which Vivaldi was giving back with a face that had lost, I was glad to see, every vestige of its smile. The invaders were on the stairs now. An instant, and, peering out eagerly, I perceived in the lead a very breathless and excited O'Meara, who, discerning me in his turn, emitted a whoop of joy that came near shaking the walls.

"Glory be! Praise hivin!" he exulted. "Now be all the saints, Sir John darling, niver did I think to look on your face again!" Apparently feeling the need of some vigorous outlet to his emotions, he wheeled and shook his fist furiously beneath the nose of Messer Gaudenzio, who precipitately retreated two steps. "Ah, ye rogue! Ah, the black heart of you!" he stormed, with concentrated rage. "Take shame to yourself, with your false letters and your lying messages! But just be marking this, my friend, if Sir John Hawkwood does not live to make you curse the day you saw the light—and a day of wrath it was for the world too—never trust me again! And now I'll be troubling you to open the door here, if that same should prove quite agreeable."

Vivaldi had recovered himself, and was gazing darkly at Michael and the men behind him, who, as I saw with amazement, numbered but a half-dozen.

"I am much more like," he said grimly, "to have my lackeys thrust you from my house!"

"Are you now?" O'Meara asked, with great politeness and extreme interest. "Sure and I shouldn't advise that same. However, I'm not asking you to trust my word, for well I know how great a faith you must be after having in the truth of others if you liken it to your own! Talk to Messer Paolo here. 'Tis said one should set a thief to catch a thief, so why not set one liar to convince another of the truth?"

It was rather plain speech, this, for him to use in a hostile city; but Vivaldi was no longer heeding him, having turned all his

attention to the gentleman just behind. This was a certain Paolo Bordone, Dal Verme's second in command; but it was not until the second glance that I recognized him, for I had assuredly never seen him look so disheveled, so desperate, and so little fitted to dominate a situation.

"It is true!" he cried to Messer Gaudentio; and the words came more like a sob of fury than like speech. "Read the warrant, see for yourself! We must give up Sir John Hawkwood, whose capture would have made our fortunes! And lucky may we hold ourselves if the duke does not turn us all off for this piece of foolery. Come, open the door—what use to dally? Here we have the outcome of Dal Verme's stubbornness! I warned him, I, that he would take the risk once too often, but he would not hear me, and behold what has come of it!"

Vivaldi gave one glance to the slip of paper which Bordone offered him, then uttered an inarticulate cry of rage, and lifted both hands and shook them in malediction on some invisible enemy.

"Fool, triple fool!" he stormed. But an instant later he had recovered himself, and was opening the door with a low bow.

"Pass out, Sir John Hawkwood," he bade me. "You are a free man! No matter, the future remains, and we shall have ample time to even our score!"

"When you please," I nodded, emerging from my prison. "Meanwhile, my condolences to your clever daughter, and my compliments to the Duke of Milan on his plot, on his success, above all on his servants!"

And I strode coolly across the gallery and down the stairs, no one, somewhat to my astonishment, so much as lifting a hand to delay my going.

IV



THERE is a time to ask for explanations, and there is a time to accept events which are apparently miraculous and act upon them before the opportunity has been let slip. It struck me that this affair belonged in the latter list; so, albeit experiencing considerable curiosity, I determined to make no attempt at gratifying it while in Pavia.

Horses were waiting outside Vivaldi's door. I mounted, so did O'Meara, and we

started off in much haste, with Bordone clattering after us as a sort of unwilling guard of honor. The street was thronged with soldiers and townsmen, evidently assembled for the purpose of watching me pass and much better informed than I of what was in the wind; and the atmosphere was, I am sorry to say, unfriendly.

Never in my life did I listen to so many curses from men, women and children, but they might full as well have spared their breath, for I was perfectly indifferent to their dislike if they would let me leave the city unhung, and no one seemed in the least disposed to lay a finger on me.

Throughout our ride to the walls I remained speechless, and O'Meara was actually enough impressed by our need of haste to follow my example, a phenomenon which struck me as stranger than anything which had occurred that night. At the Porta Nuova Bordone waved the sentinels out of our path, and they gave back sullenly. A moment later Michael and I were out of Pavia, which for an hour I had never thought to leave alive, and within a few instants we were galloping into my camp.

The welcome my men bestowed on me was a rapturous one. Round and round my horse they danced, their grim faces shining in the torchlight. They laughed, shouted, cheered me to the echo. For my part, I was beginning to feel as if moving in a dream. Reaching my tent at last, I forced a way through the crowd and entered; and then indeed I started back and rubbed my eyes, more convinced than ever that I was not awake—for seated in my own chair, surrounded by a watchful guard of my soldiers, was the towering figure of a man clad from helm to spur in armor, who gazed at me through his visor with the hard, grim eyes of Messer Jacopo dal Verme!

For a full moment I said nothing at all. Then I burst into a shout of laughter.

"Welcome, welcome, my friend!" I cried. "Upon my knightly word, never did I see a guest with greater pleasure! You thought to hang me, eh? Well, I will be more merciful; I will only take you in chains to Gonzaga of Mantua, and let him arrange for your entertainment!"

Messer Jacopo sat motionless, glaring at me like any basilisk. His fury was, I knew, so great that he dared not trust himself to speak, and I experienced an unchristian delight which, alas! O'Meara

promptly surely and completely shattered.

"Whist, now, Sir John, 'tis too fast you're going," he informed me, with a rueful chuckle. "Sure and you'll take him in the end, no doubt of that; but for to-night you must give up your pretty plan. I'm mortal afraid to tell it to you—'tis breaking your heart I'll be, I'm fearing—but I traded his freedom for yours, can you not comprehend? And a better bargain than lies in his deserving, bedad! Foul 'fall his black scowl and his evil manners! But I passed my word, Sir John, and by the same token these men must be taking him across and delivering him courteous-like to that son of perdition his friend Bordone. Do you understand now?"

Stifling a groan, I saluted Messer Jacopo as coolly as I could.

"I will not detain you, signore. Till our next meeting," said I, with a gesture to my men.

And Dal Verme arose stiffly, gave me one last venomous glance, and stalked out of my tent without having broken his impressive silence with a single word.

 WHEN he was gone, I dropped into a chair and stared at O'Meara, who began to laugh at first softly, and then with an uproarious mirth for which I certainly saw no cause.

"Well," I growled at last, as he showed no signs of speaking, "if you can find breath to answer a question and save me the few wits I have left, what species of bedlam have we all been moving in to-night?"

He gave a final crow of laughter.

"Why, 'tis a simple thing," he murmured, wiping his eyes. "You'll recall I was after hinting I had my suspicions of how Messer Jacopo went in and out of Pavia? Well, I was right. He used the north gate, the clever rogue; and he bribed our guards at that end of the camp to let him pass through; but to-night I had spies of me own on watch there, being minded to gladden you with a surprise, and but a little after your going I caught Dal Verme like a rat in a trap. Ah, could ye have seen his rage, Sir John! 'Twas a beautiful sight, a thing to dream of when days are dark!

"And then, almost on the moment, came an envoy from Pavia to inform me you were a prisoner, and to bid me surrender with all

your men! And sure and I wasn't surprised, not a bit of it," he added severely. "I expected as much from the first; 'twas the height of insanity, your action. So I explained the matter to Messer Jacopo, and begged him, most civil, to write an order for your release; and for his better persuasion—because, you comprehend, he's not the man to set free a foe just from the kindness of his heart—I swore by all that's holy he should go when you were safe."

"And he consented?" I cried, though I already knew the answer.

"He was not," said O'Meara judicially, "what you would call agreeable, nor yet willing. But in the end, yes, he consented, and he even wrote me the order, swearing the while in a most diverting fashion that never on earth would he write it. And with what happened later, Sir John, you're as well acquainted as mesilf."

For a moment I weighed what I had heard.

"Do you mean, then," I said blankly, at last, "that after all these alarms and captures and rescues we have not moved an inch forward or an inch backward, that both Dal Verme and I stand exactly where we stood yesterday?"

He reflected.

"You've spoken a true word," was his verdict, "save of course for the fact that Dal Verme can get in and out of the city no more, since I've his friends in our camp under arrest, for you to deal with. But what for are you scowling, pray? Has it not yet passed through your mind that you've been as near death as ever man was yet and have come unhurt out of that same danger? Faith, I'm thinking that in place of sitting there with a look fit to turn cream sour you had best be praising all the saints for your escape!"

There was not a little, perhaps, to be said for this view of the matter. Nevertheless, I was unable to feel any very lively satisfaction in recalling the part I had played; and my annoyance was considerably increased next morning when news reached me that Gonzaga of Mantua had made peace with the Duke of Milan, and I realized that with the passing of the Feast of Fools I had lost, for the present at least, all chance of wiping out the score I cherished against my friend, Jacopo dal Verme.



The Mate's Log

by Arthur Somers Roche

THE following is an exact copy of the scrawled contents of a bottle which was found floating in the waters of Penobscot Bay by the author. Evidently it had been immersed some twelve or fifteen years, if one may judge by the slime and barnacles that encrusted it. Surely, if what the narrator says be truth, it had traveled a long distance. Undoubtedly it had been written for private purposes and the writer did not intend that it should be seen by other eyes until the end drew near. And even then he failed to sign his name, or give other clue to the identity of himself, Lord Harry, "Her," or the yacht. However, Lloyds' reports contain an account of a pleasure yacht which left New York in 1899 and has not been heard from since. The curious might enjoy looking up the records of Lloyds. Space forbids their reprinting here. Also, the reprinting would serve no good purpose. The log follows:

Jan. 9—Wilkerson is a — fool. I've a good mind to tell him so, too, and if I do and he lifts his big fist to me, I'll cut his black heart out. He may fool the rest of them, but I know rum when I smell it. It's bad business. And this bowing and scraping. I say, to — with those swells. Them and their money. If that son of a Scotch milliner what they calls Lord Harry gives me any of his lip I'll Lord Harry him, owner or no owner.

Jan. 14—Wilkerson's drinking heavy. The big slob hasn't any more sense than to

queer his own game. Lord Harry's getting bumptious. I think he wants to make a hit with the girl. I don't blame him, but I feel sorry for her. But Wilkerson's got to quit hitting the rum. The crew are beginning to act queer. And they're a queer lot, too. I saw one of them point to Lord Harry to-day as he was walking the deck with the girl.

"Is 'ash 'll be settled quick, once the stuff is found," said the fellow.

"Wilkerson'd eat him alive," said another.

I pretended not to hear, but I did just the same. I'm going to talk to Wilkerson. He ought to leave it alone.

Jan. 15—Talked to Wilkerson. He told me to go to —. Told me he'd disrate me if I showed him any more impertinence. Said he'd put me forward with the crew. He will, will he? Maybe there's more than him concerned in that little matter.

He was ugly to Lord Harry to-day. Well, if drinking makes him quit kowtowing to that dude I don't care so much. Lord Harry claims we're off our course. Wilkerson told him, insulting, that Lord Harry might know a lot about clothes, but he didn't know much about dressing ship. I didn't hear any more. And the girl came along and called Lord Harry down from the bridge. She's a peach.

Jan. 16—Lord Harry's right, though I'll be hanged if I know how he guessed it. Wilkerson was drunk to-day. I took the observations. We are off our course. I'd known it before, but I wanted to be certain.

I understand now why Wilkerson goes on deck two hours every night. Won't say anything to Wilkerson about it. I don't give a — where we go. I signed on as first mate for a pleasure cruise and that means that we can go anywhere. Saw the girl again. She looked frightened. I knocked the Swede of the crew down a gangway after I saw her. He drew a knife and I had him put in irons.

Never sailed with such a gang of dock-wallopers. Give me a hard look, will they? I'll clean ship with them.

She's mighty pretty. Wonder what's frightening her. I'll give Lord Harry whatfor if I find he's bothering her, the lime-juice swab, him and his money.

Jan. 20—Wilkerson has quit drinking. He's ugly as sin. Shaky, too. We've been out two weeks now. We ought to be pretty near wherever we're going by this time. Lord Harry, when he isn't chasing her around, is down in his cabin poring over old charts. Tried to talk to Wilkerson, but he was too nervous. A — of a skipper. It's telling on the manners of the men. I let the Swede out to-day and the black look he gave me—

Jan. 24—Wilkerson is more like himself now. The liquor's worn off. He's ugly still, though. Had a talk with him. He's got something on the end of his tongue, and I thought he was going to blurt it out, but I guess he thought better of it. I can wait. I'm getting paid for my time, and I don't care where we end up.

Lord Harry came to me as I was taking the daily observations.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"On the Atlantic," I told him.

I gathered up my instruments and turned my back on him. He may be a bloody duke and may be worth fifty million dollars for all I know or care, but I don't want any talk with him. I say, let the owner talk to the skipper and leave the other officers alone. But his lordship is pretty nervous.

The Swede was drunk. I laid him out and put him in irons again. Had the crew before me. Pack of jailbirds. Denied having liquor. Searched the fore-castle, but couldn't find any. If I do—



JAN. 26—Buried treasure! I knew it! Wilkerson came to my cabin to-day.

"Well," says he, "I suppose you're get-

ting curious as to what we're out after."

"I'm not paid for curiosity," I told him. "I'm paid for being mate."

"But you want to know where we are going?"

"If you want to tell me," I told him.

"Good God, man," he said, "haven't you any blood in your veins?"

"I signed on for a pleasure cruise," I told him. "You said we were going to make the Azores. But you've altered her course without telling me why. We're four hundred miles south and west'ard of the Azores now. If the owner don't kick—"

"He is kicking," said Wilkerson.

"That's your business," said I.

Wilkerson looked me over curious. I kept quiet. Then he blurted out:

"Jim, when I found you in that lodging-house on West Street you were down and out, weren't you?"

"You keep your tongue off me and my misfortunes," I told him sharp. "You may be skipper, but I'm my own man and don't you forget it."

"Easy's the word," says he. "I'm not going to throw anything up at you."

"Don't," said I. "I come by my misfortune honest. If Captain Withers hadn't lied to save his own skin, I'd still have my certificate."

"I know that," he said soothing. "But I've treated you fair, haven't I, Jim?"

"Go on," said I. "What's on your chest?"

"Lord Harry," said he, and he grinned contemptuous, "has got a chart where some treasure lies buried on an island of the Azores. An old Spanish galleon, or a Portuguese, ran ashore in a storm, or chased by pirates or some other pipe-dream like that, and Lord Harry is after the stuff."

"Well," said I, when he stopped.

"You know what sort of a wild-goose chase a thing like that is," he went on. "Well, I don't take any stock in them. But we ain't such an awful way from the Sargasso Sea," said he. "And Jim, supposing I tell you that I know the Sargasso Sea like I know the short or long course across the Western Ocean?"

"I'd say you was crazy," I told him blunt. "That mass of drifting slime! It can't be charted. It never can be charted. What channels there is closes up and—"

"What do you know about it?" he asked.

"What I've heard," I told him.

"Well, I know what I've seen," he says short. "I *know!* And I can take any ship the tonnage of this yacht into the very heart of the Sargasso Sea, turn her about, and sail her out again. And I can take you to ship after ship where the gold lies so thick—jewels, Jim, minted coin; we'll be millionaires!"

"And meanwhile," said I coldly, "there's Lord Harry. This is his yacht, you must remember. And he wants to land at one of the islands of the Azores. And he's getting nervous already, isn't he?"

"Yes, — him!" snapped Wilkerson. "And he'll get more nervous before I'm through. Just because he's a blooming aristocrat and has money he thinks he can make me look cheap before a girl that's worthy of a man, not a weak-livered chinless pup like him."

"So?" said I, whistling soft. "The wind blows from that quarter, eh?"

"And why not?" he asked sharp. "Why not? Ain't I as good as he is? Ain't I as much of a man? Ain't I more of a man? Why not?"

"It's mutiny," I suggested.

"Mutiny nothing, and you know it," he snapped. "The owner—he don't amount to nothing 'longside the skipper. And I'm skipper."

"It might be called piracy," I said slowly.

"Yes, and it might be called murder, and may be called murder before I'm through!" he snapped. "And now I've said enough. Are you with me or not?"

His eyes looked past me queerly and I turned quick. The Swede, what I'd had put in irons, was standing in the doorway and he had a knife in his hands as long as a sword. I turned to Wilkerson.

"So that's the lay, is it?" I asked. "If I don't come in you'll sick your friend on to me."

He grinned.

"That's about it," he said.

"Well," said I, "while I'm mate of this hooker, my orders is obeyed. I ordered that man in irons. He stays there. Then we talk business."

"You bane wish try and put me in yar?" asked the Swede softly.

His lips were drawn back until his gums showed, and I could hear his breath as it whistled through his mouth. I looked at Wilkerson.

"He ain't needed here," I said shortly. "No," said Wilkerson. "I hardly thought so."

"But the first thing to make the men understand in a game like this," I said, "is that they must respect the officers."

"Make him," said Wilkerson.

Swedes are slow-movers and slow-thinkers, anyway. I broke his wrist with a kick and flattened him with a wallop on the jaw.

"He stays in irons, now," I said.

"He does," said Wilkerson. Then we shook hands.

Stayed awake quite a while. It may end in piracy, but—I never knew Wilkerson to tell a lie. We'll have the money and—they'll have to catch us before anything can be done to us. And Wilkerson wants the girl, eh? Oh, well, time enough to cross that bridge when we come to it. For that matter, I think that I'm just as much of a man as Wilkerson, for all I ain't so big.



JAN. 27—Well, all I can say is that Lord Harry brought it on himself. Wilkerson and I went to his cabin, prepared to talk nice and reasonable with him. But he wouldn't have it that way. When Wilkerson told him that we were away south of the Azores and that we were headed for the Sargasso Sea, where we could find more treasure than ever we'd find by following out the crazy chart Lord Harry possessed, his nobility went up in the air. He drew a revolver, and—maybe Wilkerson did hit him a bit too hard, but he had a weak heart anyway. He must have had. And now we're in for it. Murder it is, now. And a lot I care. Take away my certificate, will they, just because I obey the fool orders of a fool captain like Withers? Well, I don't owe the world nothing, and the world does owe me something, and I'm going to collect the debt.

Wilkerson called the crew aft. He explained the situation, and they took it meek as lambs, what with their cheerful grins and cheers and all. Wilkerson knew what he was doing when he picked this crew, believe me. And I'm casting a weather-eye aloft every time I look at them. There'll be trouble before we're through. But millions, Wilkerson says. Lord Harry was a fool.

Jan. 28—I've read about mutinies and piracy and that sort of thing, but I didn't

dream they could be accomplished so quiet. Everything's as peaceful aboard the ship as though the owner hadn't been slid overboard yesterday. And I'll say this for Wilkerson: when he's sober he takes care that all his crew are sober. He's given strict orders. Bellars, the bos'un, gave him a bit of lip to-day. Said one man was as good as another now; that we were all tarred with the same rope. Said he'd get about his work when he felt like it. Lord, Wilkerson made hash of him! We may be pirates and mutineers and all the rest of it, but the men have to obey orders.

Feb. 1—The girl came on deck to-day for the first time since Lord Harry cashed in. Her and her mother, who arranged, so says Wilkerson, to sell her—that's it—to Lord Harry, have locked themselves in their suite of staterooms, with their two maids. I'll say this for the girl and her mother—they're thoroughbreds. After the first screams there hasn't been a yip from them. But the maids—gosh, how they've carried on! Wilkerson threatened to cut their throats yesterday if they didn't shut up, so they've quieted a bit. But the girl is the only one brave enough to come on deck.

She's pale and her eyes have deep circles under them, but she's brave, all right. Wilkerson went up to her.

"Glad to see you out, Miss," he said.

She just looked at him. Then she said, "Murderer!" and turned on her heel. Wilkerson caught me looking at them.

He grinned nasty.

"She'll come to terms," he said slow.

I didn't say anything. But she's a beauty. Me and Wilkerson may have a heart-to-heart talk one of these days. I'm as good as he is, any day of the seven in the week.

Crew behaving good. Let the Swede out to-day. His wrist is in a splint, and he's uglier than —. Mix with me, hey? Next time I'll kill him!

Feb. 2—Crew ain't so good as I thought. The Swede has a powerful lot of influence with them. Heard them whispering together—the bos'un and the Swede and a couple of others. Couldn't hear what they said, but I can guess.

She spoke to me to-day. I was on watch and she smiled real pleasant.

"When are you going to land us?" she asked.

"After we get out of the Sargasso Sea,"

I told her. "Leastwise, that's what I think."

She shuddered. I don't blame her. I thought she was going to say something else, but she didn't. She's a thoroughbred. Wilkerson may be skipper, but we're all in the same boat. And I'm a passed navigator. I could handle this hooker better than him, if it came to that.



FEB. 10—Been too busy to write. Wilkerson's a — fool. I said so in the beginning and I say so now. There's no sense in wasting human life. I'm sore as can be. I've been sore since about the first day of the voyage. Even when I didn't know Wilkerson's game I was sore at him for picking such a tough crew. And then for him to go to the rum! Insanity's what I call it. The crew didn't have any respect for him at the very start because of his drinking and now that we're bloody-handed murderers and all the rest of it—this is a hell-ship.

Four days ago we passed a floating spar, all water-logged and rotten, and next day we were fairly into the outskirts of the flot-sam and jetsam that make up the Sargasso Sea. And ever since the men are getting worse and worse.

And it's all Wilkerson's fault with his drinking. He spoke to her a week ago and she must have answered pretty hot. Anyway, he's been sulky, ugly drunk ever since. And it's had its effect on the men. And last night things came to a head.

I was in my berth, trying to get a wink of sleep, when I heard a hammering on the door of her cabin. By the time I was out of my berth and outside her door it was all over. Wilkerson was there with a smoking revolver and the bos'un and the Swede was lying in the corridor, dead.

They'd been drinking, though where they got the stuff I don't know. Anyway, they'd tried to break into her room, Wilkerson had caught them and shot them. A good job, all right, but it's bad policy. It wasn't really necessary to kill them. And the crew are ugly.

She spoke to me this morning, begging me to be a man and rescue her from Wilkerson. Her mother's delirious and the two maids are sick with fright. She's the bravest one of the lot. She's mighty pretty. But, Lord, I can't help her.

Wilkerson saw us together, and after

she'd left me he spoke to me. I told him what she said and he looked ugly.

"Going to help her?" he asked with a sneer.

"I ain't made up my mind," I told him short.

Bad policy to talk that way, I know, but this slimy mass of weeds and wreckage that hems us in has got on my nerves. I can't be tactful. Besides, I've been sounding the men the last two days. They're mighty scary now. And they're afraid of Wilkerson. If it comes to that, they're afraid of me, but they trust me and they don't trust him. They've got an idea that, after we've found the treasure-ship we're after, he'll get rid of all of us somehow or other. The Sargasso Sea has got on their nerves, like it has on the nerves of better men than they'll ever be.

Wilkerson hired them on with the understanding that there was to be crooked work, and they ain't the kind of men that'd stop at murder more than a second. But you give their kind an inch and they want a mile. They're grumbling and discontented because they don't get cabin grub. And this morning they're outspoken mad about the Swede and the bos'un. They don't think the skipper ought to have the girl without them having a chance to win her. Drawing lots is what they favor. They think they got as much right to her as Wilkerson. Oiled my revolver.

Feb. 20—We've found the treasure all right—oodles of it. Wilkerson's cock of the walk with the men now. Three ships there were, all together, held afloat by the wreckage that surrounded them. Where Wilkerson got his information about them I don't know, but he got it all right and it *was* right. We've been busy five days transferring gold and silver. We don't hanker much for the silver, though. Gold and jewels is what we want. And three shiploads of them! We haven't been able to transfer more than a fifth of the loot. Old Spanish galleons they are. We're all millionaires or close enough to it.

Wilkerson unbosomed himself to me the day after we sighted the ships. Seems like he knew all about these ships for five years, but never got the chance to go after it, until Lord Harry offered him command of his yacht on a hunt for buried treasure. And then Wilkerson jumped at the chance. And he hired me because I was a broken

officer. And he'd been marking the men he'd take on such a cruise for a couple of years. A clever chap is Wilkerson. Clever? He's a devil.

Last night he told me of his scheme for coming clear. The papers Lord Harry left behind him prove that he was off on a search for buried treasure. Well, Wilkerson will claim that Lord Harry directed him to go to the Sargasso Sea and then that Lord Harry was lost overboard. The crew will keep mum, and as for the girl, well—I don't like that part of it a bit.

Wilkerson's going to shut her mouth by making her marry him as soon as they get to port.

"She won't do it," I told him. "She may promise to, but she won't. She'll denounce you and——"

"Will she?" he grinned. "Maybe by the time we strike a port she'll be begging me on her bended knees to marry her!"



MARCH 2—We're lost. Wilkerson is a — fool. Him and all his talk about knowing the Sargasso Sea. Nobody knows it! It changes all the time. I told him eight days ago that he didn't know how to get us out of this place, but he insisted that he did. But we're still here. The crew gets harder to handle every day. I shot Wilson, a cockney Englishman, two days ago, for looting the pantry. The men are ugly about it. But I can't help it. Let them be ugly. We're lost!

March 4—The crew are savage. They've given up hope of ever getting out of this place alive. The propeller's fouled and there's no one will go overboard to clear it. Wilkerson picked up a man—his name was Cleary—and threw him overboard yesterday because he refused to dive down and try to clear the propeller. He'd have thrown more overboard, too, if the crew hadn't huddled together and looked so ugly. Cleary almost drowned. The men are frightened as well as ugly. I don't blame them. I'm scared, too.

Each hour brings us nearer the center of this hell of drifting wreckage. We can feel ourselves being drawn into the center. We just drift along with a mass of wreckage. No channels open before us. We tried driving the yacht full speed against the wreckage, but the only result was the fouling of the screw. We're done for, all right.

Haven't seen her for two days. Last time I saw her she looked almost dead.

March 6—No pretense to discipline any more. Wilkerson carries a revolver in each hand all the time. He killed three men yesterday because they gave him some back talk. I think we're all going crazy. Wilkerson is drinking. So are the men.

March 10—Well, Wilkerson and I came together yesterday. I was watching half a dozen of the men swab down the decks. Have to keep the men busy or they'd just fight among themselves. They didn't like it, but I had a revolver pointed at them and they have no firearms.

She came on deck and Wilkerson walked up behind her and put his arm around her waist. He drew her to him and kissed her. She screamed and the men laughed. I rushed up and smashed Wilkerson on the jaw. As he went down, he drew his revolver, but I was too quick for him. My bullet carried away most of his lower jaw, and he is in his berth now, suffering like — and with his left side all paralyzed. Serve him right, say I. I got as much right to her as he has. I'm just as much of a man as he is, too.

She fainted and I had to carry her to her cabin. She doesn't weigh much.

March 15—Every one has lost hope now. Four of the men came to see me to-day as I was lounging on the bridge smoking.

"Well," says I short, "what the — do you want?"

"Fair words don't do no harm, sir," said one of them. "We come to ask you, sir, if you think there's any chance of our ever getting out of here."

"Ask Wilkerson," I told them. "He brought us in here. I didn't. I don't know the Sargasso Sea like a book same as he does," I told them.

"No more he does," said one of the men. "But, sir, you're the only hope we have and—we're getting fair desperate, sir!"

"Then say your prayers and prepare for hell," I said, "for you'll never get out of here, I don't think."

"That's your honest opinion?"

"It is," I said.

They drew off together and confabbed a second. Then they came to me again. The fellow that had been doing the talking—he's a Newfoundland man and a sea-lawyer, if I ever met one in my life—said:

"Since we'll never get to land, sir, we

make bold to ask you if you expect us to obey your orders the rest of your life?"

"You'll quit living the minute you don't obey them," I told him.

"But we don't intend to," he answered. "We've decided to form a republic and the men have elected me the first president."

"Then let them give you a state funeral!" said I.

And I got him just below the heart. They slid him over last night.

It's all Wilkerson's fault, the — fool. I don't want to kill the men, but if they don't obey orders, well—I've got a lot of cartridges left.

March 11—Caught four of the men looting the cabin stores. Two of them dead, one wounded. The other begged for mercy and I let him go. She keeps herself locked in her cabin.

March 14—The men tried to rush the women's cabin last night. They almost got me, too, before I got them away. Two more dead, three wounded, and I've got a knife-wound in my left arm. She thanked me and bound the cut up for me. She has very gentle fingers.

I *MARCH 17*—Well, here I am in a boat with three women. Her mother died—from fright as much as anything else, I guess—day before yesterday. Buried her at once. After the funeral two of them came aft to me.

"We don't want trouble, sir," they said, "but you see this thing has got to end sooner or later."

"What thing?" I asked.

"You being boss of the ship," they said. "It isn't like as if we were sailing. We're standing still. We're in port, so to speak. And we men feel as how you ought to listen to reason."

"Well, spit out your reason," said I. "What is it?"

"Well, it's this way, sir," said one of them. "You can read a burial service—you just did—why can't you read a marriage service?"

"Who's the lovesick swains?" I jeered.

"There's the two maids, sir," said he. "We men have drawed lots and us two have won them. We're here for the rest of our lives, so why can't we live like human beings? And we've agreed that you can have the girl," he ended. "Ain't that fair and square?" he added when I kept quiet.

"Suppose the women don't like it?" I asked.

"We'll make them," he snarled.

"I'll think it over," I told them, and they went forward.

I went to the girl's cabin and she let me in. I told her what was in the men's minds.

"If you don't take me," I told her, "you'll have to take some one else."

"I'll kill myself," she said.

"But how about the maids?" I asked.

She called them in and put it up to them. The way they carried on you'd have thought they was being murdered. They wouldn't listen to it. They'd die first.

"We'll all die," said the girl.

"There's another way," said I.

"What is it?" asked the girl.

"It's this way," said I. "I've killed half a dozen of them, but I can't kill them all. The men are sort of cowed now, but in a little while they'll get me while I sleep. Then——"

I didn't have to finish; they shuddered.

"So we'll get a bunch of supplies together," I told them. "The gig will hold us four and plenty of food and water for a few days, maybe a couple of weeks. And perhaps we can force the gig through the weeds and stuff. Anyway, we can try."

She almost fell on my neck. Anyway, she shook my hand and, said she:

"You're a man."

I feel kind of ashamed for being a bloody pirate. But ——, what do I care about that?

March 18—Here we are in a little gig, the four of us. The yacht has been out of sight for hours. They can never follow us. They won't know about our escape for a couple of days anyway. I opened a keg of rum and broached a cask of port before I left. I told the men it was to celebrate the triple wedding of the next day and they believed me. The bloody swine!

The women are asleep as I write this. I'm using a water-cask for a writing-desk. Lovely place, this Sargasso Sea. Still, we're making a little headway toward the north, or else the wreckage is floating past us and we're just about holding our own. I don't know. I wonder if she'll give me up to the police if we are rescued.

March 22—One of the maids died yesterday and the other dived overboard to-day.

Went mad and was under the slimy wreckage before I could grab her. Well, maybe that's better than dying of thirst. For that's what we're near. The water-cask wasn't tight and the water had most all leaked out before I found it out and put what was left into a couple of tin pails I'd brought along.

She is the bravest woman ever I heard tell of. Not a whimper out of her. Once in a while she asks me if I think we'll ever get out of this slimy hell and I try to cheer her up by saying yes. But I think she knows that I haven't any hope. But she's brave.

Her lips are very pretty, but they ain't so red as they used to be. She looks pale, too. She's asleep now, and her hair is all tumbled about her face. She is mighty pretty. And Wilkerson wanted her, the swab. I wonder if he's dead. I hope he is.

March 27—If anything, we're losing ground. I won't let her do any work at the oars and I ain't so strong as I was a week or so ago. She is very pretty.

March 28—I acted like a regular old woman to-day. I fainted at the oars. When I come to, my head was in her lap and a tear fell on my face. My forehead was wet where she'd bathed it, too. I said to her:

"Don't waste the water. You'll need it."

She looked down into my eyes.

"And you?" she said.

"Oh, me," I told her, "I—I ain't thirsty. Never am."

"How long since you've had a drink?" she asked.

I couldn't lie to her. Her eyes are very beautiful.

"Three days," I told her.

And then she began to cry.

"And I—I've had water right along and——"

I took hold of her hand and she didn't take it away. Her hand is just as soft, but it's kind of thin, I noticed.

"I don't need water," I told her.

"There's only enough for you, and——"

"A pirate!" she said, just as though she was talking to herself. "A man who kills other men and thinks nothing of it, and yet—a man!"

She wept a little then. And then she held some water to my lips. I pretended to swallow some and she seemed satisfied. I wonder if I ought to kill her before she

suffers much. The trouble is that I'll go mad pretty soon, and I don't know what I might do to her. For there's only about enough water to keep her a couple of weeks, if I don't take any, and—would it be worse for her to die or to be left alone in this boat in the midst of this desolation? It's a hard question for a man like me to answer. I wish I'd led a better life. I might know how to answer such a question if I had.



MARCH 29—Looking at her, she seems like an angel. But my throat is dry and my lips are crackling and—I may be a devil when I go crazy. I have to pretend to take my share of the water, but I ain't doing it. I wonder if there is a hell?

If there is, I'll bet Wilkerson goes there, the dog! I hope so. Wanting her, the hound!

MARCH 30—Suffered terribly last night. It's hard to keep a grip on myself. I'm afraid of going crazy any minute. It's awful to be thirsty. She's lying all curled up in the stern-sheets. She looks awful weak. I don't know what she'll do without me. But if I stay and—go crazy—all the badness in me will crop out then. And I don't want her to think me any more bad than I am. Guess I must be going to die. I never used to think this way about myself. I never used to give a — what any one thought about me.

Later. She's dead. I spoke to her a few minutes ago. She'd been lying curled up there for eight hours. She answered with a moan, and I crawled over to her side. That's all I can do now—crawl. I put my arms around her and lifted her to me.

"You've been brave and—good, Jim," she said. "And—a man!"

And she lifted her lips to mine. Yes, by God, she did! I ain't crazy. I'm as sane as ever man was. And it wasn't no hallucination nor no dream. She lifted up her mouth, and when I kissed her she kissed me! I could feel it! I ain't crazy.

I say she kissed me. — it, I ought to know. I don't give a — what Wilkerson says, she kissed me. Then she died. Exposure and everything else, I guess. But she kissed me. She's lying over there in the stern-sheets now, covered with a tarpaulin, and I could go and kiss her again if I wanted to. But I don't want to. I only kiss people what want to kiss me. And I say she kissed me!

Wilkerson's squatting up in the bow, with his jaw all done up in a bloody handkerchief, grinning at me. And Wilkerson says I imagined it. He says that she didn't kiss me. But he's jealous, that's what's the matter with him. He's jealous. I was a man to her and he was a beast. That's what she said yesterday—or was it last week? I don't know. Anyway, she said it.

And there's Wilkerson a-squatting and grinning and saying she didn't kiss me. But what does he know about it? He's dead, that's what he is, and he's jealous because I'm alive and was kissed by her.

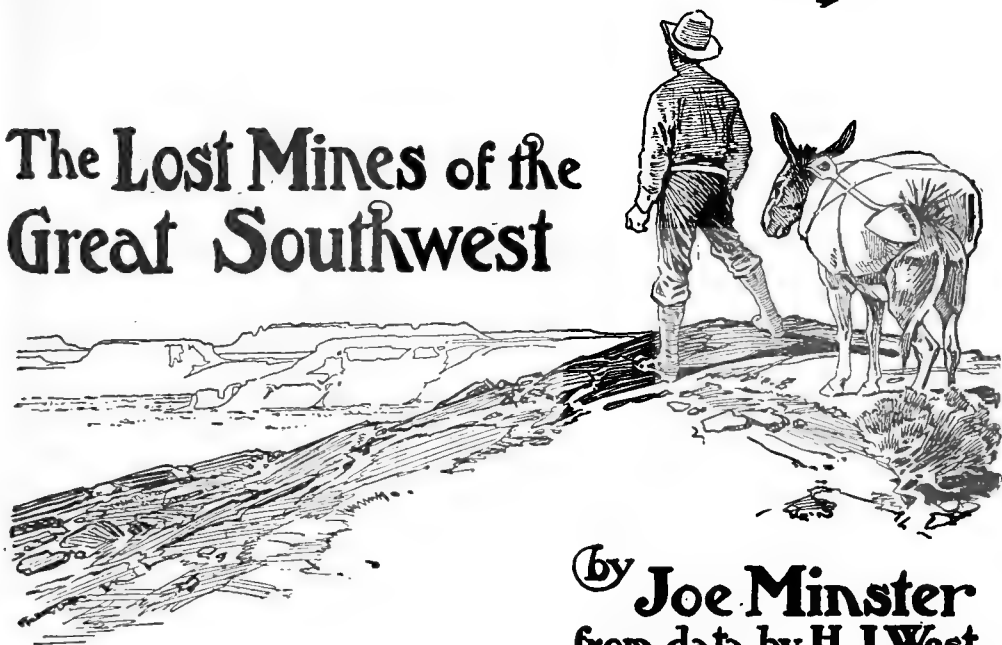
Jealous, that's what he is. And dead. To — with him, I say! And just as soon as this last is written, and I've got it corked up tight in a bottle, I'm going over to where Wilkerson is sitting in the bow and I'm going to squeeze his throat, dead or not. For she was afraid of him and hated him, and she wasn't afraid of me and she didn't hate me and she kissed me. And Wilkerson insulted her and I'm going over there and knock his grinning, lying words down his rotten throat!

He's looking at me now while I'm writing, and grinning, and saying that I'm a liar and that she didn't kiss me. And he's dead, — him, and she said that I was a man and had protected her and never done a thing that wasn't nice and on the square. And Wilkerson is nothing but a jealous dead man with a bloody grin what I'm going to wipe off his face just so soon as I get this bottled up!

Here the manuscript ends.



The Lost Mines of the Great Southwest



by **Joe Minster**
from data by H.J. West

A CROWD stood gaping into the wide window of a Spring Street store in the metropolitan city of Los Angeles. It was an awed crowd, that continued of large proportion throughout the day. Toilers from the factories intermingled with men from the offices, while society women, stepping from their limousine cars, edged through the ranks of the working girls who were also numerous in that always-changing crowd.

The lure of gold drew them there, rich and poor alike. It was the actual metal, the real yellow wealth in its various forms: quartz rock that exuded it from every pore, the nugget worn smooth on the rock bed of a stream, and the dust. It was dramatically displayed, not from a mirrored surface as though in a jeweler's cabinet, or from out the folds of rich velvet, but in its native element, lying amid rocks and sand.

It was depicted as a desert scene, weird in every detail, created by the hand of a master in topographical work and staged just within the heavy plate glass. The sands were molded into dunes and mounds across a long, flat plain and led into a mountain range which formed the background. And on this miniature desert

waste were strewn equally miniature marks of the luckless adventurer who had threaded the waste in search of wealth. His bones, with those of the pack mules, lay bleached beside the rusting tires of a wagon-wheel, telling a gruesome tale of lost hope and lost life.

And back among the mountain canyons were manikin men who toiled at the building of roads, at cutting away ledges of pure gold, at sinking shafts and erecting smelters. It was all real, so real that men and women seemed semi-hypnotized, and many of them succumbed to the honeyed words of the glib talker who invited them within the doors of the place for further examination of the newly discovered bonanza.

He was attired in the stage version of a typical prospector, wearing high leather boots, corduroy pants buckled within their tops, blue flannel shirt, red tie and topped with a wide sombrero. His chief duty lay in the distribution of highly illuminative literature on the rediscovery of one of the world's greatest mines, the famous Esperanza de Guanarre of southwestern Arizona near the border of Mexico, and extending the invitation to the flies that were caught in the web of curiosity to come into the par-

lor of the spider who peddled mining stock. Once within, the smooth talker, full of statistics and some facts relating to mining and particularly to the fabulously wealthy Annuncion property in southwestern Mexico, unfolded a tale of hardships and adventure.

He told of the wealthiest mine on the American continent, lost more than a century ago after having paid its thieving, narrow-minded and illiterate Spanish renegade owner millions and millions—so many that the taxes which he contributed to the Spanish Government and the missions amounted to nineteen millions in a period of only a few years.

"And think, my dear sir, think of it, this was but a per cent. of the total which the man garnered from the immense hidden vein of pure metal which until several months ago lay idle only to be discovered by old John Milligan!" said this "con" artist.

And if the visitor was at all interested at this point in the narrative, an old miner, deeply wrinkled, poorly clothed, but enthusiastic in the extreme, was called from an obscure corner and introduced as the discoverer of this pot of wealth. In quavering voice he told of his years of toil; dramatically he depicted his sufferings for want of water, for lack of food.

Almost invariably this brought the matter of stock to the foreground, revealed the fact that all that was necessary to bring this immense wealth to the mint at San Francisco was a railroad to the mines. Money for this was essential, and because the mine was so wealthy, and because of a desire to give many, instead of a few capitalists, the opportunity of adding still greater burdens of dollars to their already large packs, the general public was given this opportunity to subscribe for a few shares.



SO PERFECT was the staging of this financial bubble, so harmoniously conducted were all the details, that within three weeks the four men who controlled the combine had managed to clear up something like seventy-five thousand dollars on stock that sold for twenty-five cents the share. Only the fact that they used the mails led to the sudden termination of operations. The Federal authorities had been making an investigation and had found total lack of property to be one of the chief reasons why the swindlers should not

be taking-in a gullible public. Three of the four get-rich-quick artists were landed behind bars, while a fourth, having had an inkling of what was coming, managed to get away with a good portion of the public contribution.

The trial revealed that stock purchasers were of all classes—not confined to the ignorant, to the middle class or to the rich. The phantom of quick returns on little investment, the roseate dreams of opulence without work, and the idea of having a share in a famous lost property with a history, had landed its suckers by the score and the hundreds. And this was but one of hundreds of similar swindles that have been perpetrated in the past or are being carried on right at the present time and finding new 'marks' to trim.

Usually the story of the lost mine is the bait used to land the fish. There have been dozens of these properties, and from time to time old tales are renewed by a sudden strike. Right at this moment there is an old miner in San Bernardino, California, who claims that he has discovered the very mine referred to above, and he is sincere in his belief of location. There are countless miners who have deluded themselves into the same ideas, and some of them have actually discovered what have been lost mines.

These will-o'-the-wisps have beckoned many men from their homes, have sent them into hopeless regions where starvation and despair have been their only reward. They have proved to be the rocks on which the miners have been wrecked, the beacons that have gone out, and the evanescent mirages that have lured onward to fatal endings.

On the other hand, they have been the means of bringing about many other valuable discoveries of mineral wealth. They have led the phantom-chaser to other riches than the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The lost mine finds its way into the home of the élite occasionally, into the columns of the papers periodically and is always on hand to help while away the nocturnal watches around the camp-fire of the prospector. In the clubs and the bar-rooms of the Western cities where mining men congregate, where they mingle with men of social and political power, with adventurers from the South Seas, soldiers from the Philippines,

traders from the Orient, the lost mine is always one of the most interesting topics. Among these are some that have been classed almost among the fables of the ancients, but, despite that, have their foundations deeply rooted in fact.

"THE LOST ARCH" DIGGINGS

SOMEWHERE in the northern portion of the Turtle Range of mountains, a range east and south of the range designated as the Old Woman's Mountain on the Colorado River in California, lies the Lost Arch, twice located and twice lost by the peculiar working of Providence.

Jim Fish and his partner, a prospector who arrived in the days of the first gold rush to California, were traveling from Nevada to California in the year 1883, in an old-fashioned buckboard behind a team of stringy bay horses. They had apparently filled their barrel of water at the Colorado and continued on their slow search for hidden wealth.

For months they had been prospecting through the little-known country, stopping here and there, climbing hills and following streams through unknown ranges. Occasionally they secured sufficient game to supply them with meat. Once or twice they met with friendly Indians and bartered for dry corn and beans which were grown on the high and almost inaccessible mesas of that part of the country.

And then came the event which startled them. They had traveled two days from the Colorado when Fish happened to investigate more closely the water-supply. He had turned the barrel up and found that little fluid was forthcoming. Almost frantically he pulled out the bung. He rolled the barrel around to the opening and carefully placed beneath it a bucket. Less than two canteen measures remained.

The situation was not entirely new to a veteran in the mountains, but he at once realized the dilemma that confronted him. He waited for his partner, whose name is said to have been Crocker, though this fact has never been established, and when he came in from his trip to the adjacent hills he imparted his bad news.

Some vegetation showed on the range near at hand and it was decided to risk a day in search for the precious fluid in the gulches and canyons of the mountains.

"It's our best chance," said Fish to Crocker after the two had talked over the matter for hours into the night.

So early in the morning, after four or five hours of rest, they started resolutely into the hills.

"Crocker went up one canyon while I took another, the one to the right," remarked Fish, in the months that came after when he recounted the story to friends in San Bernardino, California.

"The main canyon deployed into a gulch on the right and I decided to follow this through the hot sun and down among the rocks so far that not a breath of air seemed to pass through the cleft. On and on I went, over stones larger than a house, around smooth and slippery boulders where water had certainly been at one time, but where then not a trace showed.

"My feet were lagging, my shins were barked and aching, for in the rush I had neglected to be careful. Turning a sudden corner in the gulch, I came upon a natural bridge that spanned the canyon. It was so odd, so regular in the outline of an arch that I could only stand and admire it. Beneath its shade, the most cooling place in that hell-hole, I found a large sandy area and there sank down to rest.

"While idly scratching the sand, which seemed coarse and heavy, its peculiarity attracted my closer attention. I got down on my knees and started to blow the dust away, and there before me I had a great pocket of precious metal, gold that averaged the size of wheat grains. I filled several pockets with the heavy grains and, with all thought of thirst forgotten, hurried excitedly down the canyon to impart the news of the find to Crocker."



ARRIVING at the wagon, Fish was forced to wait several hours before his partner arrived, and in that time his brain had a chance to cool. Crocker added to the coolness when he came back despairing, for he also had failed in finding water. The gold stirred little excitement in his mind. It was a case of water, and the nearest lay in the Colorado, two days back.

Gold dropped its mask of friendliness when the two prospectors started back in fevered haste and with perturbed thoughts as to the outcome. Their canteen of water had to do for two animals and two men, any

of them having a thirst at the time that would have made short work of a single canteen of water.

This was doled out by the spoonful. The horses were not given a drink, their mouths being merely rubbed out with a damp cloth. They passed mile after mile of the weird sand-dunes that seemed to chase each other in serpentine waves, gray-brown, grotesque and awful dunes that fashioned forms of ghostly nothingness on nearer approach.

The blistering sun burned through their thick flannel shirts; it seared the very marrow in their bones. When the fading folds of light finally gave way to the pall of darkness and the cold they were in torment. Their water was all gone and they had still a day before them. Far into the night, with its intense blue sky, its occasional stars, they plodded.

And then they staggered to a rest. Their physical beings refused further to answer their demands and their horses could scarcely drag on. So they rested.

Before morning light had thrown its rays across the desert they were up again. Today it was worse than the day before. They had lost their sense of direction. The sand seemed to engulf their feet, to reach up and clutch their legs in an endeavor to hold them. They stopped trying to drive the horses, but allowed the poor animals to stumble on ahead and followed in their tracks.

When hope had just expired and everything seemed gone—the chance for wealth, the hoard of gold within the mountains and, what was more, life itself, they saw, away off, the fringe of willows. They were too tired to rush on. Instead, they both lay down and rested.

And when they finally did reach it they did not drink, but dropped into the cold, swiftly moving water at the bank and saturated every pore of their skins with the life-giving fluid. For Crocker the water had come too late. His vitality had been sapped, his nerve was gone and his system depleted of every particle of life. Nothing that Fish could do for him would bring him back to health, and instead of returning directly to the mountains of the arch, Fish was forced to go on to Ehrenberg, where Crocker was given medical attention, but despite this he died within the week of reaching there.



IT WAS weeks before Fish recovered from the shock, and three months before he started out by himself to relocate his treasure. He thought it lay in the Old Woman's Mountain range, not strange because of the similarity of it and the Turtle Range. He failed the first, second and third times and many other times, until he finally gave up his fruitless task, having expended the small fortune of a life's making without finding his one great treasure.

This was not the end of the arch, however. A German prospector, whose name was thought to have been Peter Kohler, came back to corroborate the fact of the arch in the Turtle Range. It was in 1900 that he had been prospecting through the country. One day, after having climbed over a ridge, he gradually worked his way down the northern side and landed on a little mesa just above a peculiar arch. He had been a naturalist in his native land, and its strangeness made him forget all thought of gold.

He had been successful in finding several valuable claims and was going back to some settlement to find a prospector who would be willing to help in the first development of the properties he expected to obtain. Getting out of the mountains, he struck across the desert to Needles, and on the way there he fell in with a prospector by the name of John Packer.

On their first night together, with the novelty of human companionship after weeks of solitude, Kohler told many things, among them the story of the arch. He himself had never had an inkling of the wonderful deposit of gold that lay beneath its span. The story of Fish had not reached his ears and he had overlooked the opportunity of a lifetime.

Packer realized at once the importance of the discovery, but said nothing of that to Kohler. Instead he made an appointment to meet him in twenty days at Sunflower Springs with an outfit that would last for three or four months in the mountains.

Kohler continued alone to Needles and, being greatly in need of immediate cash, obtained a job on the Santa Fé. He was sent to a little station at Amboy where considerable lumber for building and some mining timber was being shipped. His work was helping to unload it, and on the third day several heavy timbers toppled over and killed him almost instantly. When Packer,

who waited several days over the appointed time at the Sunflower Springs, did not hear from Kohler, he hurried to Needles and there heard the news of the accident. Without waiting for further word, he started out with his outfit, and for nearly ten years he has been going through the two ranges in which the arch is located without being able to find it.

THE PEG-LEG MINE

JUST [about three years ago the great Southwest was awakened by the possibility of the relocation of the widely known Peg-leg Mine. The Southern Pacific Railroad was doing considerable work through Imperial Valley, a valley which five years previously was one of the hottest and most forsaken deserts on the American Continent, but which, with the coming of water through the extensive irrigation system of the Government, has grown to be one of the brightest garden spots of the world.

The only human beings who ever ventured into the valley before the bringing-in of water were the prospectors and then the engineers and their crews of hardy linemen, rodmen and assistants who were surveying roads, lateral canals for subsequent irrigation, and similar work. A large crew was stationed between Ogleby and Salton, rebuilding much of the track. They were near a watering-place called Glamis when the incident occurred which sent many of them scurrying from their work into the mountain ranges in a vain effort to find the wonderful property that they knew must exist.

While driving the work along slowly under the brazen sun and amid the occasional sand-clouds stirred up by a slight breeze from the mountains, a figure appeared in the distance, just a vague, traceable figure, slowly and wearily pushing along through the clogging sands. As it approached, it resolved itself into a wandering Indian squaw, apparently half dead from lack of water, who, without going near the workmen, passed on to the tank and there started to drink from the small open trough.

Thinking to assist her when she seemed about to drop into a heap from nothing more than the exhaustion of her toilsome journey, several of the men started in her direction. She saw them coming. With

an effort she arose and made off with all speed down the track in the opposite direction.

She was followed for a distance until she turned off into the desert again, and, having no great interest in a single squaw, the men returned. On arriving at the water-tank they discovered an old piece of blanket securely tied in a knot. On opening it they found a lot of black pieces of metal, which under a knife revealed pure gold of darkest hue. They were nuggets, dozens of them, varying in size from smaller than a dime to the size of an English walnut, and all of them black.

Hastily the men tried to follow the squaw, but by this time she had disappeared in the same range of mountains to the north from which she had been seen to emerge. When the finders of the gold had an opportunity of having the metal assayed and valued, they were brought to a realization of the worth of the discovery. The little pack had contained more than two thousand dollars' worth of property.

Such a find could not help starting a search and creating talk, and it was but a short time before a number of old miners were on the scene. They knew the value of the black gold and also that in this section, buried far from observation or generally overlooked by prospectors who had been through the ranges before, lay the old Peg-leg Mine with its fabled wealth. There was a stampede from the camp, which did not last long on account of the hardships the searchers had to face.

Only in the northwestern part of the range is there any living water, the Salvation Springs. Other portions of the range contain huge natural tanks in the mountains, which at that time were discovered in all but one or two instances to be dried up. As a result, only a few hardy prospectors were steady in their search, which had its original inception in 1853 when "Peg-leg" Smith wandered into Mohave with nearly ten thousand dollars' worth of black nuggets in his possession.

The day he pulled into the mining-camp with its three saloons and two stores, his lips were cracked and black, his tongue parched and swollen, and his hands almost bursting from the pressure of blood caused by long tramping. His mule had saved his life by half dragging him to the camp, which he would never have located alone.



FOR several days he lay abed, gripping the saddle-bags which had been brought into his rooms in one of the shacks that served as saloon and hotel. When he recovered consciousness and health, he opened the saddle-bags and satisfied the curiosity of the hundred or so prospectors who were working in the vicinity.

What they saw startled them. It was black gold. Nuggets, hundreds of them, as black as coal on the outside, but pure dull gold within. "Where did you get it?" was the question, and Smith tried to tell them, after securing from each of them a promise to share in the wealth should they find it.

According to his story, he had been living with the Yuma and the Cocopah Indians along the Colorado River for several years. Away from the river the land resolved itself into the driest, most desolate region imaginable, a region they seldom ventured into because of their dislike for their God of Fury, who overwhelmed them and buried them beneath the swirling sand-dunes when they sought the black pebbles.

They told stories of great treasures of yellow metal, but never ventured after it themselves. Smith, who had lost a leg while in an encounter with the Indians in crossing the plains, hoarded up all the stories, and after securing all information possible he decided on a trip to San Francisco to obtain a partner in his work. At that time the desert was not mapped, and it was a really hazardous undertaking for any man to attempt.

In this desolate region Smith lost his bearings. The fierce yellow sun, the dancing, jiggling heat-waves, the dust-flurries confused his direction. He finally climbed upon a black butte that stood near by and, arriving at its summit, probably fifteen hundred feet in the air, he attempted to locate his whereabouts.

"When I reached the top," he told some of his friends, "I saw just a short distance away another butte of exactly the same height and type as the one on which I stood. It was connected with a low saddle, and the twin buttes were isolated from the main range. Finally I decided on the way I was to continue and started back down the hill to my mule, which had remained at the foot of the incline.

"I had tied the animal to a boulder in order to prevent it from breaking away and carrying off the only water-supply available for perhaps a week or more. Rather rest-

less, the mule had stamped about and kicked up some good-sized pebbles that showed a strange glint where the hoofs had struck. Picking one of the black stones up, I pulled out my pocket-knife, scratched its surface and found that it was gold."

It was a repetition of the old Oriental fable of the stranded Arab on the desert, who came across a sack of pearls when he sought figs and water. Smith was running short of food and water and could take only a few pounds on the already overcrowded mule, and these he placed in his saddle-bags, proceeding then on his route.

After he had recovered sufficiently, he started out to relocate his valuable property. Others had preceded him, and a number followed close along, hoping to be with him in the find. For days he wandered about, but the twin buttes had disappeared as if by the magic of an Aladdin's lamp. He tried time and again, as did dozens of others, to locate the immensely wealthy find, a place, as he explained, where black gold lay strewn for blocks over the ground and looked like mere chunks of rock and lava pebbles.

He never succeeded in his quest. Nor has any one else. There have been many mines located in the district of the desert—the Mesquite Placer Diggings in the central part of Imperial County, which have produced thousands and thousands of dollars, the Ogleby Diggings, the Salvation Spring Diggings, but not the mine of black volcanic-like gold. There are many black buttes in the country, but they, too, have failed to give up the secret of Peg-leg's lost properties.

THE LOST PAPUAN PLACER DIGGINGS

PAPUAN, last chief of a small tribe of Papago Indians, who lived during the early part of the last century in the mountain fastnesses of western Arizona, discovered one of the richest placer diggings in existence. In the terrific struggle with the Apaches and other hostile tribes the Papagoes had been entirely wiped out; Papuan was the last man of the tribe to escape the hostile arrows, pitfalls and traps that were laid for him. Only one tribe had treated his people favorably, the Mohave Indians.

When all hope for his people was gone, he wandered into the tribal territory of the Mohaves, which was located in what at this time is Yuma County on the Colorado

River. There he took up with an old squaw, who seemed almost friendless among her people, and the two were married with all the tribal ceremonial.

The squaw was not unappreciative. She wanted to show her devotion to her lord and master, and frequently the two Indians wandered away from the remainder of the tribe for days at a time. Whenever they returned they brought with them nuggets, all they could carry, and distributed them among the other Indians and bartered with the few white traders who happened that way.

One of them, Bill McCoy, after whom the McCoy Range of mountains in Riverside County, California, is named, was running a store at Ehrenberg, a Government post, in California during 1864 and for two years later. To him came Papuan with his hoard of gold, so much that McCoy could scarcely believe his eyes. The Indian bought lavishly, traded for anything and everything that his heart desired, and in less than two years had contributed to McCoy about seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of gold nuggets.

The trader tried every possible ingratiating method to learn the secret of his mine. He wheedled, coaxed, threatened, made big offers of beads, jewels and horses, but never could learn Papuan's secret. He sent his men to follow him, but they were never successful in keeping the trail. The Indian eluded them.

In 1886 the Apaches carried their enmity to the Mohave Indians and by their indignities stirred them finally to battle. Papuan, a valiant warrior in his day, joined the people that had made him one of their own. He was killed, but in the rout of the Mohaves, his wife managed to escape.

The story of the gold had been wafted abroad, and about fifteen years ago a middle-aged German of stalwart build, H. W. Hartman, arrived in Ehrenberg and began collecting the data pertaining to the placer diggings. He discovered that Papuan's squaw was still living and his plan at once embraced her. He sought out the decimated tribe and found the squaw, now a withered old hag, and began to work upon her sympathy.

He cared for her like a son, looked after her every want and all the time tried to secure from her the location of the rich treasure-trove. For months she refused

to divulge her secret, and Hartman had just about decided that all his work was vain, when one day she told him to prepare for a journey into the mountains after the treasure.

At the same time she was stricken with a severe cold. The cold became rapidly worse and finally evolved itself into pneumonia. Her death was only a matter of hours. Hartman did not lose all hope, however, for she informed him of one other who knew the secret hiding of the placer, one Chinkinnow, who to this day is still alive.

On him Hartman lavished his attention. Chinkinnow was afraid of the spirits of those who had gone before. He demurred, refused, then half promised, and one fair day he started out with the German to show what he had seen as the adopted son of Papuan on two or three visits to the diggings. He struck out for the southeast end of the Papuan Range of mountains, came to within a few miles, then contrived to destroy the greater portion of the water-supply, and the trip had to be abandoned to hasten back to the Colorado, twenty miles away, to secure the needed fluid.

Then Chinkinnow refused absolutely to go again. Hartman went, but failed to find the diggings in the canyons and gulches that in late Summer are filled with torrents which tear through the range with perfect fury. In a few weeks they again are as dry as the desert itself. Many times the shriveled old Indian has accepted large fees to take prospectors to the place. His cunning old soul has always found a way to get out of accomplishing the feat. Always, however, as though by instinct, he has started in the same direction.

Yet prospectors have not failed entirely for their trouble. They have realized that because of the heavy wash each year the workings of old Papuan and his squaw might be entirely obliterated with the continual addition of rocks and boulders and granite to the surface of the gulch beds. With dry washers, which have just recently been invented, they have managed to make their trips pay dividends on account of the finding of other gold.

That the placer is in the mountains and not on the desert they feel certain, because of the natural concentration which occurs in a gulch or canyon. Chinkinnow has refused to give even this information, but at Ehrenberg and at Blyth, the two towns which

he visits, he is always under surveillance with the hope that he may accidentally give away the secret he carries with him.

THE LOST BREYFOGGLE

ASH-MEADOW CHARLEY, bad man of the Piute Indian tribe, is probably more to blame than any other living agency for the loss of a quartz mine that, from specimens assayed, showed value of one hundred thousand dollars a ton, for it was he who with an ax hit James Breyfogle in the head and mentally deranged him for the remainder of his life, in periods of a few days and, as he grew older, almost continually.

Breyfogle in 1863 had found his way into Austin, Nevada, and from there had proceeded in a leisurely manner southward into the Funeral Range of mountains, which border upon that desolate and unalterable waste of heat and mystery, Death Valley. In his wanderings he remained well within the boundaries of Nye County, so far as research has been able to ascertain.

One evening, while making ready for his camp, a terrific storm, the kind that comes but once or twice a year in that section of the world, broke in all its windy fury, and Breyfogle camped on the side of an abrupt peak and beneath a hanging ledge which afforded protection from the storm. He hobbled his horse (some men claim it was a burro, but from more reliable sources it is generally conceded a horse) and turned him loose to browse on the sparse vegetation to be found there.

The storm had little effect in keeping him awake, and with the rise of the sun he was ready to go on. Lo and behold! his horse, however, had disappeared. For an hour or more he trailed it up and down, finding its broken hobble, and returning eventually to his camp. After a bite of food, he climbed to the opposite side of the peak beneath which he had rested and, gaining an eminence of considerable extent, he pulled out his field-glasses for a survey of the general profile of the country.

Tired with his arduous exertions, he leaned against a ledge and quietly gazed upon the surrounding country, locating on his right a heavily timbered mountain and on his left a broad valley which showed considerable vegetation, very unusual for that part of the mountains.

His horse failed to come within his range of vision, and in half despair he turned and started to obtain a position a trifle higher up on the ledge. His hand struck a loose rock that, turning, glinted brightly in the sun which was just edging its way from among the dark gray clouds. He caught his breath. He looked a second time. Sure enough, it was gold, real gold, and not the metal that is its counterpart and has oft been designated "fools' gold."

The dull sheen came not alone from the single rock that he held in his hand. It cropped out from the surrounding rock as far as he could reach to brush away the particles of crumbling quartz. It was everywhere, and he broke off large pieces of the ore in his delirium of discovery. While it lasted he reveled in his new-found riches, sat among the hard rock pillows that spelled millions and continued his examination of the ground.

After hours he came to his senses and also to a realization that his horse was still straying. With a start he collected all of the ore he could carry and continued to trail through the few available mountain washes, passing sun-blackened, weather-beaten cliffs, into dust-gray sage and the débris of countless ages until he located a lone willow.

His horse had been forgotten in the increasing thirst which had made itself a factor by gnawing at his stomach, demanding relief. The willow stood for water, and hastily he stumbled over the corroding, gold-filled ledges to find himself finally before a spring that bubbled out of this forsaken ravine. Then, spurred again by the thoughts of his animal, the food that he had left behind and the desire to get out and announce his discovery to the world, he wandered off into the twilight and, soon, the night, which comes suddenly in that portion of the world.



FOR days—how many Breyfogle was never able to compute—he wandered about almost aimlessly, stumbling at last, more dead than alive, into Stump Springs, which are located twenty-two miles from Sandy and nine miles from Manse, all situated in Nye County. It was there that he encountered the band of wandering Piute Indians. Their love for the white invader was small, and although not of the same fighting blood as the Apache or the Sioux, they fell upon

the half-crazed miner, who in all probability stirred their animosity by some untoward act, and Ash-Meadow Charley, so named for the fact that he had resided for a time in after years at Ash Meadows in Nevada, struck him with an ax.

The blow was a glancing one, inflicting a severe wound, and it would have been followed to its termination by others had not one of the other Indians interceded. They packed Breyfoggie on one of their horses, and when near Las Vegas started him for that place, where he landed in a half-dead condition, but nevertheless clinging closely to his ore. In several weeks he was physically able to be sent to Austin, Nevada, where his family resided.

After more months of rest he at intervals had periods that were lucid, and in these he told of all his hardships and sufferings. His discovery was sent to an assayer's office and the production, according to the samples, would have run over one hundred thousand dollars to the ton, so rich was it in gold. Had it not been for the ore, little credence would have been given his tale because of the deranged condition of his brain at most times.

Nor did he stop with telling of the discovery. Time and again he set out with his horse and his pack-saddles into the territory which he thought held the riches that would put him beyond the haziest dreams of Midas. He enlisted his friends and even went so far as to locate Ash-Meadow Charley, who lived in after years in the Pahrump Valley, to assist him in the search, but all in vain.

About twelve miles south of Daylight Springs, where the eastern edge of the Funeral Range approaches Death Valley, there is a place named "Breyfoggie's Despair," for the reason that here, in the middle of the sun-parched desert, are five of his trails, meeting in a star-like center and leading off into the solitudes of the surrounding country without reaching the ultimate goal. On his deathbed he declared that whoever would locate his discovery would have suf-

ficient to enrich all of his friends and pay off the national debt.

Whether or not the Breyfoggie discovery continues among the great lost mines of the country is a doubtful question with many mining men who are thoroughly familiar with all its details and who have been among the many to try to rediscover the wealthy ledges. Breyfoggie's continued endeavor to rediscover his property, and his story of the wonderful find, proved the incendiary torch to the imaginations of many prospectors who were fired with the desire to locate the hidden wealth.

Forty years of search has not dimmed the tale in its telling. It is recounted over and over, and continues to draw the daring prospector into that region of little water and hard struggles. Nor have these other prospectors always looked in vain, for other valuable ore bodies have been located by the search.

One of these, the "Johnnie Mine," is frequently pointed out as the property which Breyfoggie found because of its general topographical outlook. Located in the southwestern portion of Nye County, it stands on a high ledge which has shown wonderful specimens of gold from the surface croppings. On the west of the mine is located the valley of much vegetation, Ash Meadows, where grow the scrub oak, the mesquite and many smaller plants of their own accord. On the other side stands Charleston Mountain, the only timbered peak in all the range, which probably is the timbered mountain of Breyfoggie's description.

Lenses of very high grade ore, running more than a third pure gold, have been found on the surface, and it is possible that the prospector, in his haste to find his horse, locate water and return to a place of plentiful food, made only a superficial examination of the property, striking several of the rich lenses and proceeding no farther in his haste to get back to civilization and outfit properly for the real work of obtaining his princely wealth.

(The remaining stories of lost mines will appear in the October ADVENTURE)



Rafferty's Gleaning

by
R.C. Pitzer

JUST tin dollars," said Rafferty persuasively, "an' I'll mail it to ye in the marnin' wid explanations."

The business man leaned back in his office chair and had a keen look at the tall brown Irishman standing, hat in hand, beside the desk. Then he deliberately examined a calendar. "The last time I saw you," he said, "I cashed vouchers to the extent of two hundred and seventy-odd dollars. You had just come down from the mines. That was enough to take you to New York and back twice over. Why didn't you go? And what have you done with the money?"

Rafferty shuffled his feet and scratched an ear reflectively. "Sure, was ut so much as that?" he mumbled. "But thin, a man must live."

"This is the twenty-seventh. That was on the twenty-second—less than a week."

"Ye don't say!" Rafferty exclaimed.

"I suppose you left your money—and you worked hard for it—in every saloon and gambling hell in this city. And now you want a little to sober up, so you come to me with this cock-and-bull story about a wife dying in New York. Well, what if she is? It's about two thousand miles away."

"But, Mr. Glassus," Rafferty wheedled, "y' see, me an' you're ust to diff'rent loives. Tin dollars wid you is a tip to the porter, an' hasn't ut been so wid me in my day, too? Whin I have ut I'm a good spender. But if the Pullman won't let me in, faith, there's the side-door wans, and wid fifty cints to the brakies now an' thin a man kin git far. Howiver, 'tis not so I'll use the money. I have wind av an invistmint payin' a good

many hundred per cints in a noight, an' if I have luck 'tis me who'll make more before marnin' than iver I made all Winter long, runnin' thot dommed drill."

Glassus drew his lips together. "At first you said the money was for brakemen and food, to help you over the continent to your dying wife."

"Sure 'tis all that," Rafferty eagerly explained. "But now wouldn't you rather roide in a Pullman? Well, our tastes is similar. So would I, sor, an' ye can't blame me. If I can't get the Pullman an' if I lose the tin dollars to boot, I'll roide the trucks an' blind baggage an' the likes av thim things; but wouldn't *you* rather not, sor?"

Glassus smiled in spite of himself. "Rafferty," he said, "if I called you a liar you'd be angry."

"Not angry; hurt, sor, hurt an' melancholy. Up in the mines I've got a diff'rent reputation than thot."

"You have. You've the reputation of being a walking Arabian Nights, a sublimated Munchausen, Ananias with an Irish nose. Before I ever set eyes on you I was prepared not to believe you on oath."

Rafferty twisted his hat in a puzzled fashion. "'Tis I who suspect I've been libeled," he grinned. "The puddin's best proved by the atin' av ut, your honor."

"Now tell me why you want this ten dollars. Perhaps I'll advance it, if you can weave a plausible yarn."

"'Tis no yarn at all. I expect to make a fortune this noight, wid the help av the saints."

"I see," said Glassus; "roulette—faro?" "Gamble is ut? I niver gambled a drop

in me loife. An' I niver would if me mother-in-law hadn't——"

"Your wife, you mean."

"Both av thim. Sor, 'tis sad. They have this dommed slapin' sickness together, an' 're expected to doi ivery second. If they weren't goin' to glory, praise the saints, I'd niver think av roulette. An' besides that, I have fierce opinions regardin' gamblers—liars, thaves, blackguards, rid divils, ivery wan av thim. Thot bein' the case, there's no harrum in me scheme, which isn't gamblin', exactly. 'Tis doin' what Ruth done, sor—ye see, I can quote the Boible like a good heretic—gleanin', an' that's all."

"Gleaning what?"

"The crums that fall fr'm the roulette table—loike Ruth, said I." Rafferty leaned over with a pretense of secrecy. "Have ye iver heard av Soapy Montmorency's joint?"

"It's a well-known and gentlemanly den of thieves."

"Sure. Just drop in afther the theayter, whin the place is crowded. Ye'll see what I mane. But I trust to your honor, sor, not to spake to or recognize me."

"Only gentlemen go there. You can't——"

"Whist; jist put on a dress-suit; 'tis all that's required. I meant f'r mesilf," he hastily added, noting a sudden bending of the Glassus brow. "I kin rint the whole outfit f'r tin dollars, an' money to spare f'r me other tools av the trade."

Glassus smiled, rather sheepishly, as his hand went to his pocket. "Rafferty," he said, "open an office. You could sell rubber stock."



IT HAPPENED that Glassus had an Easterner, Dr. Macumber, to entertain, and after dinner and a parade of the evening amusements the two found themselves in Colonel Soapy Montmorency's hell. The rooms were, as usual at that time of the night, crowded. It was a familiar enough scene to men the world over, wherever laws are not too strong and the police are not too rich. There was a general belief that the tables were not "square," and a universal knowledge that Montmorency was acquiring city property at a speed which soon would make him a political power.

More than one small fortune had been lost here, and many a life ruined, but Montmorency's luck was phenomenal. There

never had been a direct scandal to point its accusing finger; no dead man in the rooms ever had roused public opinion, and if at times some unfortunate donkey gave both money and life to Moloch Montmorency, the matter always had been hushed up to the satisfaction of everybody concerned except the victim. Even quarrels were unknown in those gilt rooms, for among the players moved several sewer-digging individuals in dress-suits, simulating gentle humanity, who effectually checked any hot-headed demonstration among the excitable.

As they elbowed from table to table, Glassus explained something of this to the physician. He had spoken of Rafferty, and both, in amused expectation, searched vainly for some glimpse of the Irishman.

"I fancy," Glassus said, "that he still had some money, or intended borrowing more from other easy marks. This is the only joint in town where ordinarily he would be barred out; and having lost everywhere else, he naturally would dream of this place, and tell himself what a fortune could be made here if he could get in. My money got him the dress-suit. We'll find him somewhere, glued to a table, if he hasn't already gone broke."

But the rooms were too crowded for one man to meet another except by chance. They were moving toward the main hall when there was a sudden cry, and a few voices calling sharply to each other.

Almost every man in sight, possessed by the one thought of saving himself—the caution of the cowardly, whose motto is "Don't get mixed in"—disappeared into other rooms or made hasty escape to the street. After the sudden surging back of the crowd, Glassus and his friend could see a man lying on the floor and writhing. Two or three of the bulldogs already were about the victim. Macumber, with an exclamation of pity, hurried forward.

"I'm a physician," he said, to one who took him by the arm.

A man who knelt beside the fallen one looked up and nodded. "So'm I," he said genially. "Don't need you, doctor. I've got him fixed, I guess. Drank a bottle of chloroform, poor soul. He just came in, and hasn't been playing, we can all swear to that. Must be crazy. Poor devil—sad case—never happened before."

Macumber was kneeling beside the would-be suicide. Chloroform was heavy in the

air. "What have you given?" he asked. "Quick, open his shirt! One of you fellows phone for an ambulance. Get me——"

He was lifted to his feet and gently crowded away from the patient. "I—I——" he spluttered, in great indignation.

"It's all right, sir," a slim man purred. "It's all right. Everything will be done for his comfort. Get him out, boys, quick! Into the poker room. Start up the music; get the crowd to moving—all right, sir, we'll attend to him. Never had anything like this happen in all our years here. My doctor knows just what to do. He's no chicken. He'll fetch the man around. Lots of experience, but not with me, you understand."

"Your doctor be ——!" Macumber exploded. "Here's my card. This is my case, Mr. Whatsyourname. I'm not going to have the man railroaded to hell. Come along, Glassus. I've got to see that this asinine suicide gets a chance to repent in jail."

"Suicide is no crime out here," Glassus grinned. "But go ahead, doctor. Only don't get too excited about it. I guess he's safe enough." He chuckled and chuckled, and his face grew apoplectic in his effort to contain himself and be fittingly sober and concerned. It was a great idea of Rafferty's, but would it succeed?



IT PROMISED well, for in the smaller room they found the Irishman sitting on a green table, his face quite as green as the cloth, and no one marveling at his sudden recovery. Under his big ear a white tie stuck forlornly, like a sacrificial flower; his collar was gone, and his stiff shirt was open upon a flaring red undershirt. His big hands waved their white gloves, circling his head like doves of peace.

"Ivery cint!" Rafferty moaned thickly. "Ivery cint an' all av thim me boss's. An' me woife an' the children widout coal in their little bel—Lord! How c'u'd I do ut, how c'u'd I do ut! Let me doi, so me woife kin sue ye, ye heretical thieves!—Gintlemen," he cried, appealing directly to Dr. Macumber and Glassus, "I take ye to witness. They've robbed me. Niver a cint left, what wid illegal an' crooked faro boxes, electric roulette wheels—the haythens! I haven't a cint left; search me an' have ut if ye foind ut. An' the chloroform I was

takin' home to aise me wife's colic—gone too, an' me alive to tell ut!"

There was a hand clapped over his mouth, and he was pulled down out of sight beyond the grouped employees. Voices were raised to drown his muffled roaring, while others hustled Glassus and the doctor and crowded them toward the door.

"Oh, ye foul-handed cannibals!" Rafferty cried again, as he got his mouth free for a moment. "Let me doi! If ye don't, I'll have the law on ye, mark thot! An' what'll the boss say, wid all his money in the faro bank! An' me woife widout her chloroform, an' her whole body racked wid the toothache—an' colic. I said colic an' I meant ut! Gintlemen, I take ye to witness!"

"Ay," the excited and unsuspecting Macumber cried heartily, "and we are. I'm Macumber—Hotel Majestic. You all know Mr. Glassus. If this man dies—and I warn you——"

"Simmer down," Glassus whispered; "it's Rafferty." The doctor collapsed.

The proprietor himself followed them from the room and shut the door quickly. Already play was resumed, and the music-box in the corner was grinding a breezy waltz.

"Gentlemen, I assure you," Montmorancy was repeating, "I assure you, gentlemen — every consideration — every attention. We'll do whatever we can for the unfortunate man. I must beg of you—you know we are no longer in good odor. The reformers are preaching. If this gets out, the police will be forced to raid us. You see, self-interest compels us to take care of him."

The two men nodded soberly.

"I'll be a party to no fraud," Glassus said vaguely.

"We don't ask it, Mr. Glassus—of course I know you. We ask just silence."

"Just silence," the physician murmured, as he took his friend's arm. "That's all, Glassus; so we'd better go home."

But in the street they were soon overtaken by a drunken-appearing Irishman in a tangled dress-suit.

"I've done ut!" Rafferty crowed triumphantly, "an' here's your tin dollars an' me thanks. Wan thousand in yellow-backs, an' I've promised to move me woife an' kids to Ireland. They've refunded ivery cint I niver lost!"



A Romance of New York and Teheran

by Grace
Sartwell Mason &
John Northern Hilliard

SYNOPSIS—Judith Gray, stenographer in a New York hotel, her home a boarding-house, lives her real life in dreams of adventure and even writes thrilling books, not for the small financial returns, but because she has to. There comes to the hotel John Savidge, world-wanderer and civil engineer. He appreciates Judy's fineness and her passion for adventure. During his brief stay the two become friends, and she learns that he is the confidential agent of big American financial interests backing a proposed Trans-Persian railway. Owing to the hostility of the Russian Government, he has had to work in secret and to leave hidden in Persia the plans for the route. He takes the girl's first name for the key to a secret cipher. Wolkonsky, high in the Russian secret service, appears in the hotel, and Savidge, quick in his decisions, suddenly persuades Judy to marry him and taste real adventure—in Persia. Courtship and marriage occupy only a few hours, and they leave at once for the Orient, as comrades rather than man and wife, though Savidge is in love with Judy. In Tiflis Savidge knocks down a servant of the Khadhkuda, or chief magistrate, for having jostled against Judy.

CHAPTER VII

THE GAME BEGINS

SHE dressed for dinner carefully, lingering over her bath and brushing her hair with a luxurious sense of well-being. It was true that she was happier than ever before in her life. And every line of her face, even the carriage of her shoulders, showed it. Her cheeks had taken on a lovely color, her eyes were bright with a light that was not the old feverish excitement; now that she had time to bestow upon its arrangement, the mop of brown hair made a shining aureole about her head. Best of all, it seemed to Savidge, she had lost the strained and restless look he had noticed so often in her face at the end of a day in the mezzanine balcony.

She opened the door of a wardrobe and with her head critically on one side surveyed some gowns that hung there. They were new. They had been bought in an expensive London establishment, and their presence in Judy's wardrobe indicated a phase of Judy's development that surprised herself. She had always believed herself to be indifferent to clothes; but on a provocative Spring morning in London, as they

strolled down Bond street, a feminine instinct, much stronger than any of her wise theories, drew her gaze to a window of sartorial wonders. Savidge, who even then had fallen into the habit of watching her face, wheeled and marched inside. She followed, protesting,

"But I don't need them! What would I do with chiffon and lacey things on a caravan trip?"

He fingered, with the wistful awkwardness a man always shows when he touches feminine finery, a little gown of snow white and silver.

"I'd like to see you in it, Judy," he said.

And the filmy frock, with three others and all the appurtenances thereto, found their way to Judy's trunk before she left London.

She now took from the wardrobe the white-and-silver gown, which she had not yet worn, and put it on with a reverent touch. She had never dreamed of possessing anything so miraculously pretty; she felt quite humble before it. When she had fastened the last hook, she hesitated an instant before she looked at herself in the long mirror.

In the corsage of the white-and-silver frock some clever hand had fastened a great satin rose of a deep dawn-pink. It challenged and brought out the faint pink

of Judy's cheeks. Her eyes, wide and delighted, met the eyes of the new Judy in the mirror, and slowly a blush of sheer astonishment spread over her face.

"Why, I'm—I'm pretty!—almost!"

She was quite naively and humbly astonished. She had never thought of herself as being pretty or as possessing any especial attraction for men. Aside from the episode of the flourishing young grocer who had asked her to marry him, she had had a very limited education, sentimentally. If she had been less humble she might have spared herself the tiny, unspoken fear that lay always under the surface of her happiness.

The thing that puzzled her was Savidge's motive in marrying her. She had herself suggested the outlines of their relation; but, womanlike, when he scrupulously and cheerfully adhered to the outline, she felt uneasy and afraid of the future. What if he should repent, some day, of the remarkable step he had taken? And after all, what had moved him to do such a thing? He had never pretended to be in love with her; she had a feeling that he was too self-contained, stood too strongly on his own feet, ever to need her. She had most of the time a feeling that it was all a fantastic dream from which she would waken some morning—most unwillingly, she admitted.

"If I am ever able to help him, it will be all right," she thought. "Then there will be some excuse for my being his wife. And in the meantime—I wouldn't know you, Judy, in that dress!"



SHE contemplated the transformed Judy Gray in the long mirror from the toe of a cloth-of-silver slipper to the satin rose on her breast. And a new, delicious idea flashed into her mind, which would never have been susceptible of such an idea without the aid of the white-and-silver frock.

"If he should come to—to care for me, really, to care——"

She started as Savidge opened the door and came in. Her cheeks were a deeper pink and her eyes brighter than he had ever seen them.

"How—how do you like this dress?" she asked him shyly.

He lifted with an awkward finger a fold of the silver-embroidered chiffon that fell away from her white shoulder.

"You look fine, Judy," he said, and took her to the window as if to change the subject.

"I've got a pony for you to ride. Thought you could have a few lessons now. It's a long way down to Teheran and a little horseback exercise will be a rest from the post-carriages. That's Hassan at the pony's head—Abdallah ibh Hassan—Smith for short."

She looked out at a tall Arab who stood gazing up at her windows with dignified impassivity as he held the nose of a sleek brown pony. His face was as if carved from oiled and polished mahogany; his great black eyes were unwinking and unfathomable.

"He's one of the few men I trust. I'd put my life in old Smith's hands—in fact it's been in his hands before now."

Savidge made a sign of dismissal and then stood thoughtfully watching the tall Arab as he mounted the pony and rode off.

"I want you to remember, Judy, that if anything should happen to me, Hassan will look out for you. You can trust him absolutely; no matter where you are, he'll take you safely home."

Judy's eyes widened.

"If anything should happen? What do you mean?"

He shrugged one shoulder in the characteristic gesture.

"This is the East, Judy. The Game is on, and over here the way of playing it is devious and unexpected."

He spoke lightly, but she was beginning to understand the significance of the lines that sloped downward from the corners of his mouth when he was troubled and accentuated the natural sternness of his face. With a flash of intuition her mind flew back to the man in the *troika* and the movement of his jeweled hand toward his sword-hilt.

"That man in the bazaar this afternoon—the Khadkhuda—is he against us?"

Savidge's face lighted with one of his rare smiles at the "us."

"Dear little Judy! In the Game every man is against us till he proves he's for us. But you're not to bother your head——"

"No, wait!" She put her hand for an instant on his arm. "Don't tell me I'm not to bother my head! I want to understand, so that I can help if you ever need me. You asked me to play the Game with you, but how can I play it with my eyes blindfolded?"

I don't think I'm a coward. I want to understand—as a man's wife should!"

He studied her earnest face intently, as if he turned over in his mind an idea he had entertained before.

"That's true, Judy; you can't play the Game unless you know it. I wanted you to be happy, just seeing your fill of the world; but I guess you're the kind of woman that is happiest as an active partner. You know I told you, back there in the Great Southern, you'd make a good comrade."

"Then give me a chance."

"A chance? Well—who knows? I may have to, my dear."

 THEY had dinner in a restaurant famous even beyond the Caucasus. Underneath the windows sang the cascaded Kura. Innumerable tapers in silver holders threw a mellow light over the motley company that sat around the tables—swarthy Asian potentates in enormous silken trousers and jewel-studded turbans; merchants from the looms of Samarkand and the pearl fisheries of Borasjin; siender-hipped Cossack officers in uniforms that fitted like skin, with double rows of cartridge cases sewed across their chests; stalwart Georgians in their long white coats; diplomats in evening dress; European dealers in curios and precious stones. And always above the clatter of a half-score of languages sounded the elemental tongue of the river as it dashed over its rocky ledges.

Savidge, his eyes on his wife's sparkling face, felt his spirits rising to the infection of her interest in the kaleidoscopic scene. He pointed out to her a figure or two with a picturesque record in Oriental politics; a lady famous for her connection with the campaign of Salar-ed-Dowleh; a fighting missionary from beyond the desert of Kara-Kum; a leather-faced American that had made ten millions overnight in the oil-fields of Baku.

"Sooner or later they all gravitate here—the big and the little ones that live by their wits and their audacity," he said. "Persia is the honey-pot that attracts them, and this corner of Russia seems to breed adventurers. See that old fellow in evening dress and a turban—the one bullying the waiter? That's the Shah's chief—"

He stopped short, arrested by an expression of profound surprise on Judy's face. She was staring beyond him to the entrance

of the café. Without a break in the conversation his eyes followed hers. A big Cossack in gray and silver, with a little mustache, had just sauntered in.

"Yes," Savidge's level voice went on, "that's Wolkonsky. I must teach you not to make your eyes as big as millstones when you're surprised, Judy. Have another cream-tart?"

"But—but aren't you astonished?"

"No, not even surprised. Had a feeling he'd turn up to-day or to-morrow. You see, we came the longest way around."

"Yes, but how did he know you'd left New York? Does he know we're going to Te——"

"Ssh! No names! The waiter at the table behind you is one of Wolkonsky's men—the whole frontier is honeycombed with 'em. Down here you must never count on their not understanding English. Wolkonsky himself speaks half a dozen languages and I don't know how many dialects. He's a remarkable chap—got a great record in the Secret Service. I've heard he's an aristocrat, in the Service for love of the Game. They say he's never been known to break his word, and his record so far as women are concerned is equally clean. It's a satisfaction to pit yourself against a man like that—it gives some class to the fight!"

Judy looked across the table at the live glow in his eyes and from him to the big Cossack beginning a leisurely dinner at a distant table. She felt a little thrill of satisfaction and a stirring of her blood. It seemed as if she were in the middle of the world and around her circled the color and light from which all her gray life she had manufactured her dreams. Savidge pushed back his coffee cup.

"Shall we go, Judy? I think to-night, if you like, I'll give you a little lesson in the Game."

CHAPTER VIII

JUDY'S LESSONS

UNDER the lights of his wife's room Savidge drew a writing-table. Then he lowered the blinds, locked the door and spread upon the table a map of Persia and a sheet of draftsman's paper.

Judy leaned her head against the back of the easy chair he had placed for her at the other side of the table and watched him

as he began to draw with swift, deft strokes a curious little map. This was a new light on her husband's accomplishments. She had never thought of his strong, brown hands as possessing so delicate a skill. Greatly interested, she watched the map grow under his pencil—an irregular parallelogram inclosing a number of blocks and dotted lines. Over some of these he wrote: *Great Staircase, Hall of One Hundred Columns, Palace of Xerxes, Mound, Cistern*. As he worked he talked.

"Do you remember, Judy, my telling you about a Lost City down there in Persia?"

She nodded.

"Where the Lion and the Lizard are keeping watch?"

"Exactly. Now study this drawing. It's a map of Persepolis—a Lost City because no one knows its name or history, and every year the sand is sweeping deeper over it. The natives shun it and travelers don't know about it, so it's an ideal place for my purpose. When I went down there first to make my investigations into the railroad game in Persia, I went as an archeologist, and naturally in the course of time I struck Persepolis. I knew at once that if need ever arose of a good hiding-place this was the spot. And it did arise, all right! After a while they got suspicious of me even as an archeologist. For six or seven years I burrowed around down here, from Baku to the Gulf and over into India, until Russia and Germany and England got on to the fact that I traveled rather too far afield for an archeologist.

"But in the meantime I'd sized up the trade of Persia, figured on the best way to link up with the Indian lines, got next to the attitude of Oriental diplomacy and made the most interesting set of survey maps you ever saw. It took me eight years to get them; but it is all there—the best route for a Trans-Persian railroad any of them have figured out yet! See——"

He spread out a map of southern Europe. "From here to here it will catch the trade of the Gulf. It will replace the great caravan routes and cut off five days between London and Bombay. And it will tap a gold mine for the men that build it. It will be a world-famous trunk-line some day—and not one of them has figured on that route. I've got it all on my maps, down to the last spike.

"But when I tried to get out of the country and back to the States with the plans, I saw I couldn't do it. Russia wanted those survey maps too badly. Twice a caravan-serai I was in was raided—that was when I saw Wolkonsky first. And when I tried to get out through India I was held up near the frontier and only a lucky fluke saved my maps. Then I doubled back to Persepolis, and I cached those maps in the nicest little safety-deposit vault in all Persia."

He leaned back in his chair with a reminiscent smile. Judy's eager eyes were fixed on his face.

"They mean a lot to me, those maps," he went on. "Ten years of work, to say nothing of my future. Of course they're in my head—I could duplicate them roughly—but that isn't the point. No one else must get hold of them. With those plans in their hands Russia or Germany or England would have the advantage of knowing how many trumps we hold. Russia has known for a long time that there is a project on foot for an American line across Persia; but she doesn't know just where the lightning will strike. It means a good deal to her to know, do you see?"

"But if you are the only one that knows the location of the plans they're safe, aren't they?"

"Absolutely. But unfortunately they can't stay there indefinitely. Before the second day of June they've got to be in Teheran. For this is where the Game comes in: The Shah has been for a long time secretly receiving bids for the big line, playing off both ends against the middle, as usual. But, six months ago, Russia—with England amiably encouraging her—forced the Persian National Council to set a time-limit for bids and for completing the road. Do you see Russia's game? The time-limit is all to her advantage, for she's on the spot and she's had years the start of us in her knowledge of conditions. Besides, she's figuring on delays due to accidents—accidents happen frequently to interloping foreigners over here!"

Judy made a sound of incredulous amazement.

"Do you mean to say they wouldn't scruple to—to——"

"My dear Judy, Russia has the cleverest diplomats in the world! She's playing this Game for tremendous stakes—the invasion of India and the ultimate control of the East

—and her diplomats are not letting a little matter of ethics stand in their way. They've thimble-rigged Turkey, shifted the cut on Germany, and run in a cold deck on England. Do you think they'd hesitate to turn a trump from the bottom to win this trick?

"No, no, Russia plans to build the first Trans-Persian line. She'll use every means in her power to learn the amount of our bid, and then outbid us. She'll steal our plans if she can, and then use them if they suit her. And above everything, she'll prevent my getting to Teheran on time if she can."

"You must be in Teheran before the second day of June?"

"Yes. There's just time enough to do it, for I must go first to Persepolis for the maps—that's three hundred miles out of my way—and then back up to Teheran. That's why there must be no prolonged delay at this end, do you see?"



SHE looked up at him as he stood absent-mindedly staring down at the map, and saw the lines deepen in his face.

"Then you think there is going to be a delay?"

"I don't think so much as feel it. Couldn't tell you why exactly; I suppose it's a little like the sense an animal has of danger: comes from living in the open most of my life, I guess. When I saw Wolkonsky in the restaurant to-night it wasn't so much a surprise as a confirmation. I can't foresee his next move, but I can be ready to meet any one of the half-dozen I figure out he'll make. That's why I think you'd better know the exact location of the plans. Then, if they should hold me up here——"

He dropped into the chair opposite her and studied the map with abstracted eyes.

"I believe you could do it," he went on, half to himself, "with Hassan to help you and this map I've drawn to guide you. If there were need of it, Gholam Reza and his men would help. From Tabriz it's safe enough by caravan. At Ispahan you'd branch off——"

"Yes," she prompted him eagerly, as he fell silent. "At Ispahan I'd branch off—how far is it from there to Persepolis?"

With a start he sat up and looked at her. She was leaning forward, her chin in her palms, her eyes intent and very bright. In the little white-and-silver gown, with the

pink rose on her breast, she seemed to him all at once disconcertingly feminine—the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"I don't know what I'm thinking about," he said brusquely, "to drag you into this. I want you to be happy and free—to write your stories——"

"Stories! Aren't you offering me a chance at a real one? Oh, I don't want to be treated like a doll! I want to be in the Game. If you need me, I want you to use me. Whatever you told me to do I should do it. If they hold you up here, I'll go on—I'm not afraid."

"By Jove! I believe you'd do it!" His eyes glowed as he looked at her. "And get away with it, too!" he added.

She blushed for pleasure.

"Then teach me everything! I must know the map of your Lost City by heart, and the cipher."

He laughed and folded the map away in his pocket.

"You can't begin at midnight, my dear. To-morrow we'll have another session. Go to bed, now, and don't lose sleep over what I've told you, will you?"

"But wait. There is something I don't quite understand. Why should you care if they do hold you up here on the frontier? When they find you haven't the survey maps they will let you go, won't they?"

He smiled grimly.

"That is exactly the point. Wolkonsky isn't after the survey maps just now. It's because of another little matter he's following me. You see, I'm carrying sealed papers for the Persian Government from the Eastern Securities Company—which is French for the heavy end of Wall Street! They're the bids for the big line. They would make interesting reading for Russia, and it is these papers Wolkonsky is after. I had figured on getting across the frontier ahead of him, but, now—well, something tells me it won't be easy."

"But he wouldn't suspect *me*!" she suggested. "Couldn't I carry them, somehow?"

He shook his head.

"I'm carrying them in a safe place, Judy. You're not to bother yourself about those papers."

"Then I'm not to be a partner in everything?" she said wistfully.

He took her hand and smiled down at her gravely:

"You'll never know what a help it is to have some one to talk things out to. I've been alone so long over here in this shifty country!"

He fell silent and stood looking at her hand. Although it was small and white it possessed supple strength. It seemed to him that the hand and her round white arm had a subtle fragrance of their own. A troubled cloud came over his eyes.

"I wonder what right I had to bring you into this Game," he said, as if he thought aloud. "Over there in America I only figured on the freedom and adventure I could give you; but here——"

He broke off short and dropped her hand. For it had come to him with a pang that he had not figured on her growing so precious to him that the very thought of danger for her gripped his heart and weakened his muscles. He turned away abruptly.

"Get to sleep, and in the morning we'll have a riding-lesson," he said.

But after he had gone she remained awake for a long time, lying in bed staring at a square pale of light that was reflected on the ceiling from a lamp in the courtyard below. She was too excited to sleep. Her thoughts seemed to form three strata in her consciousness: on top floated fragments of stories, evanescent and elusive; below those her mind went over and over the things Savidge had told her that evening; and deep down underneath these thoughts something sang in her heart.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST TRICK

DURING the next few days while they waited in Tiflis until arrangements could be completed for their journey by caravan and post-carriage south through the land of the Lion and the Sun, Judy soaked in innumerable new impressions and reveled in the color and detail of this city on the most picturesque frontier in the world. Each day after the early morning riding-lesson in the public gardens along the Kur she wandered with Savidge or Hassan through the bazaars or through the ancient part of the city.

The Oriental quarter claimed her and she never tired of elbowing her way through its narrow, stinking streets. About her were strange figures—Armenian money-

changers in shiny broadcloth; handsome Georgians, swaggering along in their long white *tcherkas* and caps of snowy lambskin; squat, narrow-eyed Tartars, their flat faces the color of old brass, in queer, outspreading pleated skirts and huge mushroom-shaped headgear; sallow, scowling Persians; natives of Daghestan, gaudy with weapons; cringing Jews in fur-edged caps and long gray *khalats* girdled at the waist with the prescribed rope; women of the Orient far more concerned in keeping their faces covered than their persons; Russian soldiers handsomely uniformed; mud-bespattered Cossacks; and types from all the wild and ragged tribes of the Caucasus.

Now and then a camel, its disdainful head held high, came rocketing down some narrow street, crowding high and low against the walls of the shops. Judy only laughed when Savidge commanded her to keep behind him. She was like a child, reckless amidst the excitement of a county fair. She was interested in everything—in the Russian and Armenian shops, in the great ill-built houses with their hanging balconies of painted and carved wood that are neither Russian nor Persian, behind the latticework of which the painted ladies of the Orient practise their ancient profession.

Of the bazaars she could never get enough. Day after day she revisited them to stand in front of the diminutive shops where Persian merchants, squatting on brick ledges or lolling on cushions, pull lazily at their bubbling water-pipes. Among a thousand and one oddments from the four corners of the East she wandered delightedly. She stroked wonderful fabrics massive with silver and gold, gloated over heaps of diamonds and rubies, fingered cobwebby veils from Bokhara, furs from Astrakan, water-jugs studded with turquoises, and coveted bangles of raw amber, and hairpins of green jade.

She laughed at an almost nude baker that slapped big sheets of leathery dough against a hive-shaped oven for all the world as if he were fighting off a swarm of bees; and lingered fascinated before booths where craftsmen inlaid helmets, shields and breastplates with silver and gold, and brawny armorers damaskeened gun-barrels and crescent-shaped swords.

Thus the days were crowded; and at night, after dinner, she went over and over the map of the Lost City; she learned the

cipher Savidge used—the cipher with her name as its key-word—and more about the map of Persia than many Europeans ever know.

 AND two days later, as she sat in the railway station with their luggage piled about her, it came to Judy that here, at last, the Game began. They were to go by rail to Akstafa, from which point the caravans start for the interior. Abdallah ibh Hassan had gone on ahead to arrange for horses; and there remained only a short railway journey between them and the real East.

All about her rose the usual Asiatic clamor, the desperate chaffering at the ticket-window, the interminable conversations of families, who, after the manner of the East, had arrived at dawn to catch an afternoon train.

Across the station Savidge was turning away from the ticket-window. She saw him glance twice at his watch, a thing so unusual with Savidge, who always seemed to catch his trains by some sort of unhurried intuition, that it brought her to attention as sharply as if he had spoken. For an instant she lost sight of him in the crowd; then his voice sounded at her elbow.

"How's your nerve, Judy?"

When she looked up at him for an explanation he was leaning against a pillar, a cigar in his fingers, and his eyes fastened on a distant corner of the station as if he meditated on a cobweb in the vaulted roof.

"I seem to feel," he said serenely, "that we're about to have an afternoon call from our friend Wolkonsky."

At the name it seemed to Judy that every nerve in her body became like a fiddle-string tuned a shade higher than concert pitch. She stood up beside him, and then she could see what he had seen—the tall Cossack, with his little black mustache and the insolent carriage of his shoulders, coming across the platform; behind him three officials in uniform, and following them, with his white teeth bared in his black face, the huge lackey that had brushed against her the first day in the bazaar.

"You're not afraid, are you, Judy?"

She nodded, moistening her lips.

"What will they do to you?"

"Hold me on a trumped-up charge."

"How long?"

"I don't know; if it's too long you must

get those survey maps—you know how we planned it—*s-s-sh!* Remember, he understands English."

The official party was half-way across the station. Savidge lifted his hands, cupped as if to shield the flame of a match, and she saw that he was writing on a piece of paper. Wolkonsky halted in front of them.

"Have I the honor to address Mr. John Savidge?" he asked politely.

Savidge nodded, and the Russian drew a folded official paper from his pocket.

"I am sorry," he said, "but I have an order for your arrest."

Savidge shrugged his shoulders and gazed at the roof.

"What is the charge?"

"Assault on the body-servant of his Excellency the magistrate of Tiflis!"

"That will do as well as any other."

The American smiled ironically and turned to Judy. As he did so a sudden puff of wind blew back his coat and revealed a pistol-holster at his right hip.

Wolkonsky pointed at the pistol.

"I'm sorry," he said again, "but for a foreigner to carry arms is against the law of the city."

Savidge unbuckled the belt and handed it over without a word. Then the greatest man in the Service did something that caused the men of his command to gape with astonishment. He stood erect and gave his prisoner the military salute.

"It's all in the day's work, Mr. Savidge, as you Americans say. If there is anything I can do for you personally——"

He glanced for an instant at Judy, and Savidge said:

"Thanks. I should like you to see my wife to the train."

For a fraction of a second Wolkonsky stared as if surprised, then he assured them with politeness that it would afford him great pleasure to be of assistance to Madame.

"Thanks!" said Savidge again dryly. He looked at the pistol-holster in the Russian's hand. "There's something else, if you don't mind—that gun. I think a great deal of that gun. I've toted it night and day for ten years and we've been through some tight places together. I'd hate awfully to have it confiscated or lost. Will you keep it for me till—till this matter is settled?"

Wolkonsky smiled good humoredly.

"Assuredly. But unfortunately I may

not be here when this affair is—settled.” His smile took on a new shade of meaning. “I leave to-morrow morning for Teheran on official business!”

“I see,” returned Savidge thoughtfully. Then, with an odd smile, he met the Russian’s eyes squarely. “I, too, am going to Teheran—on official business. You can give me back the gun in Teheran—on the first day of June!”

The Russian bowed again with a gleam in his eyes.

“I shall be most happy to do you the service. In Teheran, then, on the first day of June, I will return your gun. My address—”

He offered a card with an urbane and mocking politeness. Savidge accepted it with a politeness equally imperturbable. To Judy, with her heart throbbing in her throat for terror, they were two unreal figures in an unreal setting. She searched Savidge’s imperturbable mask for some hint as to the part he intended her to play.



AS THE train came in and the babel around her increased wildly, her knees began to weaken in a sickening fashion. She could have thrown herself upon her husband and begged him to keep her with him. She knew for the first time the fear that can sink the heart amidst alien surroundings and strange tongues.

But she stood erect, her head up, her eyes fixed on Savidge’s face, waiting for her cue in the curious little drama. It came when Savidge turned toward her and she felt in the hand he gave her a folded paper pressed against her palm.

“Good-by, Judy, take care of yourself,” he said in a very good imitation of the tone of a husband bidding his wife good-by until the week-end.

The cool voice braced and steadied her instantly. Wolkonsky retreated a step, courteously, although Judy knew his eyes were never off them.

“You’ll be a good soldier?” Savidge lowered his voice.

“I’ll try,” she answered simply.

She felt her brain clear and her knees grow steady. Then Wolkonsky offered her his arm; one of his men took charge of her luggage; the other two walked on each side of Savidge, and thus she was escorted to the door of a first-class compartment.

When they had put her bundle of rugs and other belongings on the seat of the empty compartment, she turned to look at Savidge, who stood negligently erect between the two officials, a grim smile on his face.

Down the platform the guards were slamming to the doors of other carriages. At the sound she felt a swift and poignant stab of terror for him, of tenderness and of regret for something she had left unsaid.

She leaned a little farther out, her eyes enormous and very dark. The train jarred a little and a guard ran toward her door.

“Good-by—good-by, John—dear!” she whispered.

The next instant a very much astonished official escort found itself pushed aside, the guard collided with a flying figure, and John Savidge, on the running-board of the carriage, had caught his wife in his arms and kissed her good-by.

CHAPTER X

A TRAMP ROYAL

LATE in the afternoon the train crawled into Akstafa—Akstafa, a collection of mud-houses, a great caravanserai, a railroad siding and an abominable odor that is a matter of civic pride on the part of its citizenry. Before the train had come to a standstill Abdallah ibh Hassan stood at the door of Judy’s compartment. To Judy the sight of him was like a face from home. She could have wept with relief and gratitude when he made his comforting, efficient bow in the doorway. His keen glance swept the compartment as if in search of his master, and Judy beckoned him in out of the confusion of the platform.

“He is arrested, Hassan,” she whispered. “But you and I are to go on to Ispahan. We will wait there a fortnight. If they detain him longer, we’ll have to go on to—that city you know of. There is word for you.”

She handed him a fragment of paper torn from the bottom of the note Savidge had scrawled for her as he waited for Wolkonsky to come up to them in the Tiflis station. It contained half a dozen words in Arabic. Hassan’s somber black eyes lightened and glowed as if the reading of those words kindled a sudden flame behind them. Then he thrust the bit of paper inside his burnoose and bowed ceremonially, touching with his forehead her knees.

"I am in the Memsahib's service," he said.

Judy felt touched and a little embarrassed by the bending of this tall, deep-eyed Arab before her.

"Thank you, Hassan," she said, with a catch in her voice. "You and I will have to help the Sahib now."

She went at once to the station to inquire for a telegram; for in the note he had pressed into her hand Savidge had written:

Go on to Ispahan by caravan as planned. Will overtake you if possible. Ask for a wire at Akstafa.

The train had disgorged a motley crowd of passengers, all bound for one of the outgoing caravans—soldiers, merchants, traders and their chattering womenfolk—and had been met by half of Akstafa. Judy's pulse quickened as there came to her ears the dulled boom of camel-bells and the shrill "Illah!" of donkey-drivers. All the world seemed about to go a-journeying. In spite of her difficulties, her spirits soared. At the door of the station, turning to smile at a tiny Arab boy in a fez and little else, she was suddenly arrested where she stood by the sound of a voice.

It came from within the station—a rich and unforgettable voice that spoke American with an unmistakable American twang. Judy's heart leaped to its nasal music.

"Watch closely, benighted child," the bland voice was saying. "See! I place this piece of money in my left hand—*sabe?*"

Judy looked in the door. In the middle of the empty room stood a solidly built man with a head as large and round as a pumpkin. A shock of sandy hair curled over the collar of his flannel shirt, his coat was off and his sleeves were rolled above the elbows. Judy's first glance took in the details of the arms—long and slender and delicately molded—and the hands, soft, white and supple. The tapering nails of the little fingers were fully half an inch long. In front of this remarkable figure the native station-master stood solemnly watching.

"Now! Eeny, meeny, miny, mo! One, two, three, out goes she! I open the fingers of the left hand and—the ruble is gone. Gone! you mud-headed son of a she-ass! Are you on?"

"I am a Meshadi of Adarbaijan, and an honest man!" protested the station-master. "The ruble was in the hand of the Presence.

That is truth. I swear it on the Tail of the Sacred Lion!"



THE round, clean-shaven face confronting the station-agent wrinkled humorously, and the gray eyes twinkled as he stretched forth his arm and plucked the silver ruble from the Persian's beard.

"I'll do that again," he said suavely.

Slowly and deliberately he placed the coin on the flat palm of his left hand. The station-agent's eyes followed every movement as intently as a cat stalking a field-mouse. Judy also craned her neck, fascinated by the supple hand.

"Watch closely, son of infamy, and do *poojah* to your gods!"

One by one the fingers closed pliantly over the silver piece.

"The ruble is in that hand!" The station-master pointed. "May I be the son of a burnt father if it be not as I have said!"

Judy did not understand this, but she understood with amusement what followed. The American raised his right hand and snapped his fingers thrice.

"*Hic — haec — hoc!*" he intoned. "Abracadabra! Holus-bolus! Gee-whizz! Christopher Columbus!"

One by one the fingers opened, like petals. The station-agent's eyes boogled out of his head, and Judy gave a little gasp of astonishment. The ruble had vanished.

"Are you on?" asked the suave voice. "*Sabe?*"

"It is the work of devils!" murmured the Persian. "A blight shall fall upon my house and my daughters shall die unwed!"

Judy gave a ripple of irrepressible laughter. At the sound the American whirled.

"Well, I'll be hornswoggled!" he cried, staring, as if by some wonderful sleight of the gods of magic she had sprung into being on that hard mud floor as a rose-tree grows and unfolds before the eyes at the command of a wizard. Then he took a long breath and mopped his forehead.

"Beg y'r pardon, but you had me going! Sure, thought I'd have to take the count!"

The gray eyes beamed and the wide, straight mouth was stretched into a grin. As a rule Judy did not like men that laughed, but this good nature was irresistible.

"I'm from New York," she said.

"Well, well, little old New York! Who'd

a thought of meeting any one from home in this benighted burg? And how are my old friends Mr. and Mrs. Herald Square and all the little Herald Squares?"

Judy laughed. "Do you live here?"

"Me! In this rube town? I should say not! It's on the blink! Worse than Hoboken or Fort Wayne!" He reached into space and a card appeared at his finger-tips. "Allow me!" With an extravagant bow he handed the card to Judy. She took it rather gingerly, half expecting it would vanish the moment she touched it. The card was ornate. At one end was the picture of a magician in flowing robes and a conical cap engaged in the lucrative profession of extracting gold and silver coins from the ambient atmosphere. In large type, with rubricated initial letters, was the inscription:

THE GREAT JAGGARD, THE WORLD'S MASTER
MAGE OF MAGIC!

There was nothing in the appearance of Mr. Jaggard to justify the pomposity of his business card. Round of face, sleek of body, merry of eye, he looked anything but a man of mystery.

"I don't know what a Mage is," said Judy, "but I'm sure you don't look like one!"

The Great Jaggard laughed; and when he laughed the upper part of his face became pleated with wrinkles through which his shrewd gray eyes twinkled for all the world like a wise old elephant's.

"Bull-con," he explained; "plain, unvarnished bunk. But it gets the ginks!" Then in answer to the question-marks in Judy's eyes: "I'm Tom Jaggard—from nowhere-in-particular and bound for God-knows-where." He rubbed his smooth round chin reflectively. "Y'see, I'm what might be called a citizen of the world; haven't been home to stay in twenty years—guess it's in the blood, what they call the *wanderlust*."

A line of Kipling flashed into Judy's mind. "I know—you're a tramp royal!"

"Don't just dope out the royal bunk," he returned, "but so far as the other part's concerned, I'm the original son of rest. I can loaf hard enough for twenty men. . . . Anything I can do for you—interpreter, guide?"



JUDY shook her head smilingly and crossed the room to inquire of the station-master concerning her telegram. She was told there was nothing for Mrs. John Savidge. Her heart went down like a plummet.

"Are—are you sure?" she faltered.

There was something about the station-master's shifty eyes that made her mistrustful. Although he had just answered her in intelligible English, he now poured forth a glib speech in the vernacular. Judy looked despairingly at her fellow-countryman. Jaggard at once interpreted:

"He says your Presence is an illumination to his eyes; but there is no telegram, so help him Mike!"

"I am a Meshadi, and an honest man," cried the station-agent, looking from one to the other. "May a curse fall upon my house if what I have said be not the truth!"

Judy would have turned away dejected, but Jaggard said under his breath:

"Wait!"

She watched him screw his face into an expression as ferocious as it is possible for a round placid face to assume; and her mind as she looked at that absurd face, flashed back over seas to the dimly lighted stage of a theater on which a ridiculous figure flitted to and fro to the swinging measures of an outlandish song.

"That's what he looks like—the Yama-Yama man!" she thought.

Then, startled, she shrank back against the wall. For in the most amazing mixture of Coney Island American and the high-flown phrases of the vernacular the Great Jaggard was roaring out a curse upon the house of the station-agent, and upon all that therein was. Incidentally he added that the station-master was a liar and the offspring of liars.

The face of the Persian turned the color of ashes.

"The Excellency is *Sihrbaz Kabir* [a great magician]. Thrice have I journeyed to Meshed; thrice have I prayed at the shrine of Iman Riza; I am a Shi'ate and an honest——"

Jaggard pointed a potent forefinger at the cringing man.

"Hand over that message, my fuzzy friend!"

The black eyes of the Persian glittered nervously.

"May my eyes be a forfeit! May a curse

fall upon my house! May my wife's breasts wither up and my daughters go unwed to the grave if I have deceived the Excellency!"

All at once Jaggard seemed to swell and tower over the protesting native.

"A curse, then, upon thy house!" he thundered. "I, too, have journeyed to Meshed and to Mecca and to El Medinah, and my magic is greater than thy gods. Thy eyes shall be forfeit, for thou hast lied to me. A curse shall fall upon thee and thine, for thou hast lied to me *twice*. Thy daughters shall go unwed to the grave, for thou hast lied to me *thrice*!"

The awful thoroughness of the curse brought the station-agent sprawling at Jaggard's feet. Judy, shocked, was about to protest in the man's behalf when the Great Jaggard turned his wrinkled face upon her and solemnly winked one eye.

"Ain't I a wiz?" he said.

"He's lying," he added calmly, and lifted the man to his feet with no more effort than a child would make in lifting a doll. There was plainly strength in those rounded arms and soft white hands.

"Look at me! Look me straight in theeyes!"

He made some passes in front of the scowling face. The native stood as one in a trance; his forehead was beaded with sweat; his breathing was short and jerky; and the pupils of his eyes were dilated.

"Behold, O foolish one, a magic greater than thy gods can do!" cooed Jaggard.

He made a stroking motion in front of the blank face. A shiver ran through the body of the native.

"Tell me, Meshadi, the words that came down from the sky!" Jaggard commanded.

"The words—the words——"

The native's flat voice seemed to come from the back of his head.

"Will forward consignment——" prompted Jaggard.

"Will forward consignment——" repeated the voice.

"Of Premier phonographs——"

"Of Premier phonographs——"

"To Tabriz."

"To Tabriz," droned the voice.



JAGGARD snapped his fingers in the man's waxy face. The color tided back; the eyes resumed their natural expression, and the rigid lines of the face relaxed.

"Did I not tell thee thou art a liar?" purred Jaggard. "The words were, 'Will forward consignment of Premier phonographs to Tabriz.' Is it not so? Am I not greater than thy gods, Meshadi?"

"It is the work of devils!" muttered the station-agent. "But it is even as the Excellency says!"

He trotted into the room where the telegraph instruments droned monotonously and forthwith returned with a telegraph-blank. Judy took it and read:

Will forward consignment of Premier Phonographs to Tabriz.
John Savidge.

It was a message in the code she and Savidge had agreed upon. There could be no doubt of its authenticity; for, interpreted, it read: "See Gholam Rezah in Tabriz." And of Gholam Rezah she had heard much.

She turned a bewildered face to Jaggard.

"It is my telegram, all right. But how did you get it? And why should the station-agent have kept it back?"

He shook his head.

"Remember you're in the East, where nine times out of ten the things that happen are not understandable by the Westerner. I know nothing of this business, believe me; but I do know the East, and I advise you to remember the words of the wire, but forget that the native ever delivered it. That'll make a friend of him; and throw off the scent whoever gave him the order to hold up your telegrams. See?"

Judy thought it over.

"Perhaps you're right. Tell him it's all right, please."

Jaggard handed the blank to the station-agent, who seized it with hands that trembled with eagerness.

"The Sahib is greater than many gods!"

Jaggard waved him away with a gesture of droll complacency. He looked indeed not unlike some prosperous god full-fed with adulation.

"And because that is so," he said, "there shall be no curse upon thy house. Thou shalt wax prosperous, thy wife fat, thy daughters shall wed and give birth to sons, and—and the Memsahib shall forget the words that came down from the sky."

The station-agent salaamed profoundly before Judy and made as if to prostrate himself at Jaggard's feet.

"I shall yet pray for the Excellency at the tomb of the Prophet," he cried.

Outside upon the station platform Judy found herself walking along beside the Great Jaggard as if she had known him for years. He had the irresistible quality of taking things for granted that is said to be the perquisite of royalty.

"How did you do it?" she said to him. "Was it hypnotism or what?"

He laughed his great, hearty laugh.

"I couldn't hypnotize a muley calf. Worked a little bunk and had him scared stiff! That's all!"

"But the message—that looked like magic!"

"Magic be blowed! That message came in over the wire just before you arrived. I was in the office, and—and I used to be a telegraph operator out in Marshalltown, Iowa, before I went on the stage!"

CHAPTER XI

THE CARAVANSERAI

AT THE other end of the platform Hassan was patiently waiting with the luggage. He looked at Judy's escort with a frown of suspicion.

"This is a countryman of mine, Hassan," Judy explained. "He is going with the caravan to Ispahan."

Tom Jaggard took in the dubious welcome of Hassan's expression with a speculative screwing up of his eyes. Then he said something in the vernacular that instantly smoothed out the face of the tall Arab.

"*Allah Yakmah* [God be with you]!" Hassan returned. "The great magician is known to me by word from the south. We go to the caravanserai, Memsahib?"

With Hassan striding ahead and Jaggard guarding the rear, Judy was escorted through the narrow, twisting streets. This was the season of the year when trade was brisk between the north and the south. Akstafa had all the life and color of a "boom" town, and also all its wickedness, with the difference that here it was entirely and naively in the accepted order.

Traders and traffic-men that come in from their long journeys with dust-choked throats must naturally rinse them with wine in the Palaces of Delight, where also their pipes are filled with scented tobacco by dancing-girls lithe as the young bamboo, and their ears are delighted with the untranslatable love-songs of the East.

The dusty gray streets were brightened with splashes of raw color from the dresses of Armenian women, or the burnouses—purple, blue and blood-red—of Arabs. Frequently the dirty drab of some plastered wall would flame with the bright, coin-bedecked cotton dress of a dancing-girl as she leaned in a doorway. And matching the violent colors were violent noises—the shrill cries of the drivers of yawning beasts, the shrieks of the hawkers of henna, the incessant clanging of camel-bells.

Everywhere they turned, Jaggard seemed to be at home. Two old men playing a game of chess in a doorway looked up to exchange greetings with him; a nabob in white burnoose and gold-embroidered waistcoat, whose turban denoted a pilgrimage to Mecca accomplished, saluted him as a brother. Dancing-girls in a street where it would be unsafe for a European to walk alone gathered around him laughingly, filling the whole place with the noise of their clanking bangles and anklets, and refused to let him go until he had stuck pieces of silver to their foreheads. When he had overtaken her after one of these encounters Judy looked at him smilingly.

"You seem to be pretty well known!" she remarked.

"My middle name's Popularitee!" he admitted unblushingly. "Y'see, I'm not a bit particular where I show my little bag o' tricks—in the streets, the bazaars, the dance-houses; and these female highbinders think I'm the real thing—the king-pin of esoteric science! Remember that dancing-girl back there—the tall, slim one that put her arm around my neck and whispered in my ear? When I was through here last she offered me a *toman* for a charm to cause the death of a faithless lover!"

"How absurd! You didn't give her one?"

"Sure! And it worked beautifully, so she told me back there. Caught him with a rival one night and stuck the knife herself into his gizzard! But the dear child really believes it was the charm that did it. So you see I'm the Big Noise down this way!"

Judy shivered.

"It's horrible and it's—it's ridiculous, too!"

"It's a good graft," he said simply. "Human nature's the same the world over: I made a mighty good living in New York one Winter selling love-philters! Surest thing ever! It's easier to pull off over here,

though. The postal authorities ain't so particular—and faithless lovers just naturally don't live long."

Judy gasped; but in spite of herself she smiled. Possibly if her life had been more sheltered and her training had not included six years on the mezzanine floor of a great hotel she would have been shocked by Tom Jaggard and his philosophy of life. But too many men had come and gone through the doorway of the bronze cage for her to be very far wrong in her reading of a man's character.



FROM the first moment when she met the kindly, twinkling eyes of Jaggard in the station she had liked him. His calling appeared to be dubious and not too dignified; he was a charlatan with the jargon of a charlatan, but she had written letters for men of the most prosperous respectability in whom she instinctively felt less confidence. Underneath the tricks, the slang and the naive conceit of the man she was aware of the poise of an artist, of the man that has learned his craft so well that no one in the world can beat him at it.

She had an odd feeling about him that in spite of appearances he was rather a big man. In the very nature of his wanderings he must have rubbed elbows with infamy and shaken hands with vice; but she noticed that the dancing-girls, with all their merri-ment, offered him no familiarities; the faces of the old men that spoke to him lighted admiringly, and even Hassan the Watchful treated him with grave consideration.

"Do you know Persia well?" she asked in the hope of learning something more about him.

"Oh, so-so! The graft's good in the East; there ain't many spots this side of Suez I haven't struck one time or another. You see, I teach the benighted children tricks, advise 'em in matters of love and war, and read their unregenerate futures. I haven't collected many callouses clipping coupons"—he looked humorously at his white hands, strong and incredibly supple—"but I've seen this old world from Jersey City to Jericho, an' d'you know, I like her better every day!"

"For to admire an' for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide—
It never done no good to me,
But I can't drop it if I tried!"

Judy quoted.

Jaggard looked around at her quickly.

"The fellow that wrote that knew!" he said.

In the great inner court of the caravan-serai, littered with bales of cotton, bundles of carpets and bags of merchandise, a tumult of preparation for the night was on foot. In the middle of the court a ring of camels knelt mumbling and bubbling around a stack of hay; pack-mules, donkeys and shaggy-haired Persian ponies munched grain from greasy blankets; Shirazee stallions kicked viciously at the caravan dogs prowling everywhere in search of food. In one corner men were cooking supper over dung-fires. The smoky flames struck upward on their bronzed faces, on their beards dyed flaming crimson with henna, and on their ragged oily locks.

The master of the caravanserai came to meet them, Orientally extravagant with his epithets of welcome, and Judy was piloted across the seething court, up a narrow stone stairway and out upon an upper gallery. High up in one of the towers flanking the entrance to the caravanserai was a tiny room, not much more than a niche in the masonry.

With a flourish of pride the *na'ib* ushered her into this chamber of honor, the *bala-khanah*, to be occupied only by travelers whose way has been paved with silver in advance. There was neither door nor window, bed nor chair; but an urn-shaped hole in the center of the floor contained some smoldering embers.



AS USUAL with the setting of the sun, a cold wind had sprung up and it swooped in at the open archway until the *na'ib* strung a goat's-hair rope and stretched a blanket across it.

Then he bowed low.

"*Khuda hafiz!* [God be mindful of you!]" he said. But—"God's curse upon all unbelievers!" he growled in his beard as he groped his way down the stairs.

Hassan lighted a primitive lamp—a wick of hemp in a bowl of castor-oil—and spread a thick floor-cloth over the floor. In a corner he arranged Judy's roll of bedding. A qualm of homesickness, loneliness and something very like fear smote her at these preparations for the night. A babel of strange noises, voices, grunts and squeals came up from the courtyard below.

"You will share my supper, won't you?"

she said to Jaggard. "It's all so strange. Of course I'm not at all nervous, but—but it's a little lonesome, not understanding what any of them are saying, isn't it?"

Jaggard smiled as if he understood.

"Sure, I'd like to have supper with you. We'll talk about the only town, eh?"

While Hassan cooked supper over a fire of faggots in the stone gallery they leaned on the railing and watched the scene below. Around three sides of the court were arched recesses in the wall. Before one of these a red and yellow blanket swung.

"That is my suite de luxe," Jaggard explained.

He went on to divert her with a droll exposition of the etiquette of the caravan-serai—a hotel in which there are no rooms with bath, no haughty office force, no grasping bell-boys, no dining-rooms or café, where the guests provide their own beds, cook their own meals and sleep where they choose or can—in the arched recesses, on the stairs, in the cloisters or the bedunged court itself, according to their mental condition upon returning from an evening in Akstafa's palaces of illusion.

In their nostrils was the reek of smoke, the pungent odor of the camels, the scent of hay, of dust and saddlery.

"If some one should uncork some of this smell under my nose in Kennebunkport, Maine, I'd say '*Khuda hafiz!*' and jump out of the way of a camel before I'd think!" Jaggard said, wrinkling up his nose.

"I like it!" declared Judy. "It isn't a nice smell, but I can imagine it haunting you and bringing you back sooner or later. What is that man with the black beard, the one that sits on his heels over there against the wall?"

"Do you mean the cameleer with the yellow girdle?"

"Yes. He's asleep now."

"No, he isn't asleep. No Arab ever sleeps that way. Why did you ask?"

"Why, I don't know—" Judy hesitated. "At the station I thought he followed me down the platform. He has sat there so long against that wall. Once I caught him staring up here at us."

"Well, I don't know as I blame him," said Jaggard with cheerful audacity. "Umm-m—that chicken of Hassan's smells good!"

To himself he thought: "Now I wonder what she's doing down here? She's got a

little private worry of her own. And she's carrying something she's deathly afraid of losing or I'm no wiz."

He watched her out of the corners of his shrewd eyes, for he was puzzled by this phenomenon of an American woman, young and good to look upon, traveling the caravan ways alone, with only an Arab servant to look after her. Outwardly he took her for granted in a genially offhand manner that hid a very lively curiosity. He knew something of John Savidge and his mission in Persia, as he knew something of very many hidden currents in the life of the awakening East.

Judy had spoken of her husband as detained in Tiflis on business; but Jaggard knew it must be very serious business that made it necessary for Mrs. John Savidge to be traveling alone to Ispahan.

"She's all right," he said to himself; "but sooner or later she's going to need you, Tommy; and when she does, you've got to be on the spot! She's from home, and God knows it's been long and long since you talked with her like."

They ate their supper of chicken served on a mound of curried rice, and Jaggard told her droll tales of his travels. Presently the noises of the manzil court almost ceased and even the wolfish caravan dogs grew quiet. Judy took one last look down into the court as she said good night to Jaggard. A dozen fires flickered in the dark, around them lay huddled shapes of men, some already heavy with sleep, some pulling indolently at their water-pipes.

"You know where I bunk," said Jaggard in his offhand fashion. "Send Hassan for me if you need me."

She thanked him and assured him she would be all right with Hassan to look after her.

CHAPTER XII

A DAUGHTER OF THE VIKINGS

BUT in spite of her pretended good spirits she felt decidedly forlorn as she rolled up in her blankets in the *bala-khanah*. She went over and over the events of the day; and especially lived again that too-brief moment in the station at Tiflis, when there had been no time to say the things she had wanted to say. She thought of that last moment when her husband had kissed

her. She felt again that kiss, burning and hungry—the kiss of a self-contained and lonely man, who lets his soul loose for an instant.

"Oh, my dear!" she thought, "where are you now? What will they do to you? I wish—oh, I wish you were here! You've been so good to me, and I never let you know how much I—I cared. And now—it's too late!"

The stone floor became harder and harder, the honorable *bala-khanah* grew colder, and the heart of Judy shivered and was afraid. It became unbearable to lie there shivering and uneasy, and she got up, walked to the doorway and lifted the curtain. Instantly a muffled figure started up from the stone floor of the gallery outside and she realized that Hassan was on guard. When she expostulated with him for choosing such an uncomfortable sleeping place, he answered simply:

"It is the order of Savidge Sahib, Mem-sahib!"

She went back to her blankets with a sense of warmth and security in her heart.

"Adventure!" she thought gaily. "This is what you've always wanted, and *he* may be here to-morrow!"

All at once she was asleep. She slept like a child, until Hassan called her from the doorway. Morning streamed in around the edges of the blanket curtain, cheerful noises came up from the manzil court, and Hassan had achieved the crowning miracle of a basin of hot water.

Later he served her a breakfast of hot tea and cold boiled eggs, which she ate sitting on a bale of cotton. In the gray dawn every one was getting ready for departure, roping great bales and packs to the baggage-beasts, cooking, eating, smoking and making the greatest possible uproar. Yet, even in the intervals of arguing vehemently or plying the lash, they were religiously polite to one another.

"In the name of God, brother, throw me a rope!" shouted a camel-driver struggling with a pack.

"In the name of God, brother, here is a rope!" returned the other.

The black-browed caravan-guards appealed especially to Judy; with their daggers and long guns they reminded her of her own whiskerandoed pirates. She half shut her eyes and began to weave them into a story;

but in the midst of it she found herself listening to a voice. It came from the cloisters behind her, a woman's voice, speaking in the vernacular. She could not understand the words, but the voice itself had the quality of crystal—clear and cold—a most unoriental characteristic.

She closed her eyes for an instant, and as she listened there passed before her inner gaze a vision of gaunt gray mountains, a sullen fjord and snow lying steely purple in the twilight. Then a word dispelled the vision as a shot scatters a flock of birds. The voice had said "Good morning!"



JUDY turned around and looked into a pair of eyes that had in them the glint of blue ice. The woman was tall and very straight, blonde and big-boned. Her yellow hair was braided into thick ropes and twisted about her head like a coronet. She held in her hand a pith helmet about which she was twisting a green veil. Over the helmet she looked at Judy and smiled—an impersonal smile like the sudden flicker of pale sunlight scross a stretch of Wintry water.

"We are the only Europeans with the caravan," she said in chiseled English that had in it only the vaguest hint of a foreign inflection. "We shall be very glad of each other's company before we've gone far. It is the most monotonous traveling in the world."

Judy's sea-green eyes opened wide with astonishment. It seemed a most amazing thing that another woman speaking her own tongue should have sprung up in this tumultuous caravanserai court.

"Oh, you've been over the route before?" she exclaimed.

"Many times." The voice was coldly matter-of-fact. "I am Miss Arlundsén—Lina Arlundsén. I make the trip every two years, usually to Ispahan, sometimes as far south as Shiraz. I am the Oriental buyer for Rosenthal, of Paris—you know their shop in the rue de la Paix, perhaps? I must look after my luggage—I have only just come in by train," she added, turning away. "*Au revoir!* We shall doubtless be very well acquainted soon."

Judy was still staring after her new acquaintance when Jaggard sauntered up. "Good morning! Who's your friend?" he asked.

"A daughter of the Vikings, I believe.

She's Miss Lina Arlundsén. Striking, isn't she?"

"A peach!" he assented cheerfully. "Great hair, and say, she can sling the vernacular. Oh, good work! See that cameleer step round!"

Miss Arlundsén was directing the loading of her baggage-camel. The cameleer in the yellow girdle, with two assistants, was working for her as a cameleer seldom works for any one—with a sort of despairing haste. And away from the big straight figure of the Oriental buyer for Rosenthal respectfully swerved the courtyard tangle of men and beasts.

She stood calmly in the midst of the confusion, one gauntleted hand on her hip, her handsome shoulders well back, while not even a caravan dog dared to sniff at the heavy riding boots under the short cross-saddle skirt of tweed. Her cool blue gaze met the eyes of Jag-

gard and returned again to the work in hand.

"I wonder," said Jaggard slowly, "I wonder what's her graft?"

Judy laughed.

"Have you ever heard of Rosenthal of the rue de la Paix, in Paris?"

"Sure! Biggest shop in the world; makes a specialty of curious junk from everywhere. Get you anything from a reindeer skin to a piece of carved teakwood from Java. Anything you want; if you've got the price, Rosenthal will deliver the goods."

"I see! Well, Miss Arlundsén is a buyer for that firm. She makes the journey to Ispahan or Shiraz once every two years. I'm glad she's going. I like to meet out-of-the-ordinary people, don't you?"

"Sure!" he agreed readily, "when they have hair and eyes like Lina there!" Then under his breath: "But I wonder what's her graft?"

TO BE CONTINUED

Pete



And how Adventure
Came to him

by Gardner Hunting

A SOUND body and a number of wholesome instincts blessed Pete. Also he possessed a fresh complexion, a large lump of pure curiosity, and youth. He had decided to see the West, and, for that purpose, sat in a Pullman-car smoking-room on a certain great railroad that makes a specialty of showing that section of the country to the curious. With him was also Budlong, who was enough like him, and enough unlike, to be a friend.

They were from a part of the country where corn grows so thickly that there isn't

space for much else, including anything like satisfactory gun-play; which may be one of the reasons why the advertising pages of the magazines had furnished the only knowledge of six-shooters they enjoyed, and why their interest in roomy desert or mountain-side spaces, with weird stories attached, was big enough to encourage the smoking-room *raconteur*. Not that they believed the stories that were going. The advertising pages had not been their sole reading.

There were four other men in the hazy little room. One was a laugher, who had the shrewd and merry eye of the traveling

salesman, and who found all the stories amusing. Another was a heavy, sodden man who wore boots, with his faded drab corduroy trousers tucked into them, and took the stories with a skeptical squint. The third was the story-teller, a fat little man whose eyelids winked continuously like those of a person in anticipation of imminent disturbances of the peace, such as he found pleasure in describing. The fourth man was a lean, slow-moving chap with yellow hands and cigarette-stained fingers, whose mouth was surrounded with two days' growth of stubbly beard, tobacco-painted, and with one eye bloodshot to a solid crimson where it should have been white.

They were running through a little valley where the track paralleled a tiny river. There were stretches of sand and gravel, bright and gilt in the sun where the water spread shallow. There had been one place where a well-worn ford had suddenly presented a picture that corresponded well with the sort of scenes of the West most commonly painted, with a little bunch of cattle in the water and a couple of lounging horsemen in chaps and neckerchiefs.

And the story-teller had interrupted himself to say that this was where the D. L. E. outfit had, just eight years ago last week, overtaken and hanged Jerry Dolittle, of rustling fame, "with the cow-ropes running over that outstanding limb of scrub oak, there, and his feet dangling over the creek." And the traveling salesman had undertaken to interject, with its proper measure of laughter, that he desired none of that in his, doubtless meaning the dealing with outlaws. From which arose a discussion of courage.

The story-teller averred, with the artist's appreciation of the value of subtly flattering his auditors, that men who got about and saw the world and themselves faced dangers and hardships habitually, had little conception of how rare a thing real bravery is—the kind that can face pain or death "and stick." The man with the squint broke his sodden silence to endorse that statement with a bit of profane emphasis.

The drummer suspended a chuckle to say that such bravery was usually quite profitless anyhow. Budlong made bold to add that he youthfully opined a man could hardly know whether he possessed courage or not till he was tried out; at which the

young fellow with the bloodshot eye grinned and spat and regarded him with cheerful contempt.

Petee listened. He was not a natural talker. Nothing very original was said, but the story-teller found a hook for another tale, the train crawled deeper into the rocky valley, and Petee found himself losing most of the fresh story while he speculated as to what courage is. Having been all his life a peaceable farm boy, living with gentle animals and honest neighbors, he was inclined to the opinion that he did not know.



THEY were half an hour out of the last town of consequence and the gilding sun was getting down behind the tops of the hills, when they rounded a bend of the little river and entered a narrower and rockier gorge. The heavy man with the squint got up and walked out of the smoking-room. At the door he paused, looking down the aisle of the car. Then he turned back suddenly.

"Sh—sh—sh!" he whispered mysteriously, through the space beside the curtain, and then he beckoned with his head. "Come out here," he added. "Look wot's going on!"

It was an effective gesture, that of the squinter's head. The rest got up and filed out curiously. The drummer was first, the story-teller next. Budlong was third, and Petee last—save one. The young man with the red eye did not stir, at first, but brought up the rear when the others had moved ahead.

As he reached the door, Petee suddenly heard him snicker. He himself had not seen what might be the attraction outside and he turned to discover the source of the fellow's amusement. What he saw was a yellow hand with cigarette-stained fingers, holding a blue magazine-pistol up, and pointed at him, with a bloodshot eye peering unwinkingly over it.

"Hands up!"

It was the accepted fictional form of demand. Petee was suddenly conscious of a hush of voices about him, and of the prompt intrusion of the train's rumble. He looked at the insignificant little black hole in the end of the pistol pointing toward him and felt the stir of two slow emotions. One was annoyance, as at a silly joke; the other was curiosity. He had no belief at all in

the reality of the thing, at the beginning. He even disregarded the mandate, which he had understood well enough but which he did not take seriously. The fellow who had given the order and who threatened him was undersized and unimpressive, and his doughy face had little if any suggestion of a mood for killing upon it.

But he of the red eye abruptly swore in nasty phrase, and with a personal application that made its own effect. Moreover, Petee noted that the rim of high light around the end of the pistol-barrel was broken by the clean-cut slot of the rifling inside. The gun was unmistakably intended for business use, and the boy from the corn-fields recognized that something actual was happening; being of a practical turn of mind, he began to appreciate the unwisdom of trifling with anybody who held such advantage, even while a warm flow of indignation was spreading through his blood.

He put up his hands and backed against the outside of the smoking-room. He could see, then, that the men who had come out ahead of him were all in like attitude, with hands raised heavenward, earnestly if not prayerfully—all except the squinter, who was also holding a neat little, effective-looking, high-speed shooting-machine.

The latter had shaken off his soddiness and was business-like too. In his eyes was a black glitter that reminded Petee of the eyes of a rat in the corn-crib at home. He was impressive enough, in a rat-like, cruel way. He could kill.

"Sit down, you two!"

The squinter ordered the two men nearest him into a vacant front seat of the car. As they sat down, with utter docility, Petee looked on along the aisle and saw two more men with pistols standing near the middle of the coach, facing one each way. At the farther end was a fifth gunman. It came to him that this was adventure—in a way, the sort of thing he had vaguely looked forward to on his trip; but it was oddly irritating and not very exciting.

He was not at all carried away by any of the sensations he felt. He was getting mad; he was quite sure about that—a slow anger that rose up hot, from a swelling under his ribs to a flush on his neck and a smarting of the eyes. Despite their elevated position, his hands were warm with the

same thing. But he could not discover excitement anywhere in him.



A PRETTY thorough-going gang, this, he thought. Five to a car! He had read of one-man hold-ups, and had supposed these daring bad men of the plains and mountains rather took pride in pulling off a day's work unaided. Judging, also, by the cowed look on the several faces he could see among the passengers, about three of the five guns were superfluous.

So far as he himself was concerned, the longer he weighed the matter, the more willing he became to stand still. They meant to take his money, of course; but he did not worry about that, for there was more corn-money back where the corn was. And to put up a bare-handed fight against these armed chaps to save a purse would be a little like putting your bare hand into a feed-cutter to save a buttercup.

The preliminaries were not long drawn out. The squinter asked the drummer and the story-teller for their money, and they handed it out. The outlaw grinned a little at them as he took their pocketbooks and emptied them quickly into his hat. The drummer grinned back a bit sheepishly, till the squinter dropped his plundered purse carelessly on the floor. Then the laugher's face straightened out, as if he resented this last as an indignity quite separate from and more aggravated than all the rest. The story-teller's eyelids winked as incessantly as lightning on an August night before the storm; but there was no storm in his meek eyes, behind them.

So this was a hold-up, thought Petee—a real train-robbery that would be in all the papers all over the country to-morrow, that would be read of, back in Indiana, with more or less only half-credulous interest and some contempt for the robbed. And what an absurdly matter-of-fact, unromantic, untheatrical affair it was! Perhaps it did involve the threat against life. He had not thought about facing death, and all that, when he had looked into the red-eyed one's gun-muzzle.

After all it was just a matter of a lot of folks scared into allowing a collection to be made of their ready money for the benefit of the chaps who had the nerve to take it. And the collecting was simple, it seemed. Everybody knew what was expected, and

everybody seemed ready to contribute. Some of them were pretty gray in the face and their hands shook. They were frightened and hugely excited. Somehow Petee was not getting the thrill. Perhaps that was a reason why he was getting madder; perhaps another was the squinter's grin.

And then, all at once, Petee forgot his little wondering attempts at sensation-analysis and just watched the collector of gratuities. For the outlaw had come to the second seat on the farther side of the car, and there was an old lady in it whom Petee had not seen before, and who was softly and rather pitifully whimpering. She had passed up a little old worn wallet, of the sort that has two knobs on top to snap past each other for fastening. The squinter had turned it bottom side up and a half-dozen coins had dropped from it into his hat. Now, he was holding it out toward her and his grin was gone.

"This ain't all you got!" he remarked in a tone like the blunt end of a cold-chisel.

"Yes—it is," responded the woman.

She was gray-haired and white-faced and trembling all over. She had on glasses and a little crisp black straw bonnet that had ribbons to tie under her chin. Her eyes were as wide as a startled baby's and her mouth was working in a way that was painful to look at.

Petee stared at her and thought of a little grandmother of his own, who had fallen down-stairs one day at home, and who had looked like that when he carried her up to her room afterward. He had been fond of that gentle little grandmother, and he felt sorry for this one. It was just as pathetic as it would be expected to be, to see her in contact with such an experience and so terrified by it, and Petee had an unspoiled, country-boy heart.

But the man was insisting.

"Don't try to fool me," he said. He set his hat down in the seat, and, bending over her, took hold of the black cape-affair she wore, where it covered her flat, narrow old bosom. "Give up! I ain't goin' to waste time over you, but you got more money than that!"

"Oh, I haven't!" she cried.

The very brevity of her speech, even without her abject terror, appeared convincing to Petee.

He wondered why the squinter did not believe her immediately, while his own

nerves were squirming at the roughness of the man's great hands upon her. They were such a little way from him that he could see details with distinctness. He could see the black cotton-gloved hands of the woman fumble over the man's big knuckles with feeble effort to free herself; and he could see the brownish white of her eye past the bow of her glasses as she gazed up in horror into the brutal face above hers. It reminded him of the eye of a shy-ing horse, seen past the blinder.

And then, without any hint that he meant to do it, the man with the gun suddenly raised it and struck the old woman with the heavy barrel end of it a blow on the head—a blow that made the old straw bonnet crunch audibly and caused the pistol to click!



IN THE first half-second Petee could not believe it. It was all of that before he even winced. But when he saw the woman's rigid figure go limp against the seat cushions it was as if somebody had suddenly punched a screw-driver, or a gimlet, or some such unpleasant implement, into a tender spot in his body and had turned it around there!

After that, there was one breathless instant of realization, and then something that was probably a passion rose in Petee. And it did not stop rising, but went up into his head like something that scorched all the inside of his veins and filled his brain bursting full.

He could not stand it. He had the impulse to scream like a raging child, but he did not do it. He nearly choked on the involuntary thing, but he only turned and jumped out of his place and took the three bounding steps to the squinter's side without feeling the floor under him. And then he struck with all his might, and all the anger he had felt and all his pity for the old lady multiplied a hundred times into a blasting, blinding fury that could not hit hard enough and hoped desperately to kill. And because the outlaw was still bent over the old woman, and because his arms were extended and protected his head, the boy chose, not with knowledge, but with an animal instinct, to swing his arm under and up, in an awful upper-cut in the man's unguarded ribs.

Petee felt something give in his arm and a hot pain shot to the shoulder; but he was

too busy to think about it. He saw the wide hips of the outlaw, clothed in faded drab corduroy, drop down floorward before him, and he caught a glimpse of the man's face as it turned partly sidewise and the chin struck the seat-rail. Then he heard the fellow's gun clatter on the floor and he stooped and groped for it.

Before he was up, there were shots in the air, each of which seemed to strike his ears and hurt, like a square, flat slap. When he was on his feet again it appeared that everybody was shooting, and the gun of the red-eyed man was spitting long streams of rose flame from which ruddy sparks trailed and the aim seemed to be at him, Petee.

Western bandits are said to shoot very quickly and very straight. Perhaps they usually do. The fact remains that neither the chap in the end of the car, nor anybody else, had yet hit Petee. The boy held up the squinter's gun, therefore, and tried also to shoot—with his left hand, because his right had turned weak. But, as he knew perhaps as much about an automatic pistol as the squinter knew of compassion, he drew no results.

He stood still and pulled the trigger desperately for an instant. He felt something, like a flirt of scalding water, across his cheek, and surmised dimly that it was a bullet that had touched. He felt a sickening shock and pain in his limp right arm, and knew he was hit there, too. But he did not care now. He felt a mad exultation in the blow he had struck one of these beasts, and was only eager, burning, panting to get another!

But something else was happening also. Petee became aware of it when a bursting crash of breaking glass cut into the din—for there are few kinds of racket that will drown that jangle. And abruptly, he saw Budlong, his chum, red of face and wild of eye, turning with the scarlet-headed fire-ax from the box in the wall and uprearing it to strike. And, in a breath, another finishing blow was landed, and the rose flame-stream stopped.

Petee laughed with a squeal and felt moisture run out on his lips. He made a jump to the last section on his left and turned with his back to the smoking-room wall. He knew that the men in the middle of the car were still shooting, and he wanted to face them. He did not know that the big mirror in the panel behind him set him

out as an ideal target. He saw the two firing at him and in another second he was hit twice more.

A ball plunged through the muscles at the base of his neck and another cut across the top of his hip-bone. Both hurt cruelly and he felt his legs shaking. They began to spread under him and he knew he was going down. But, at the last instant, he saw a man stand up coolly, in a seat just beyond his enemies, and shoot them both point-blank, as if it were the most commonplace thing in the world to do in a Pullman-car—like paying his fare.

And, as Petee sank upon the seat behind him, there seemed to be a sudden cessation of noise and the car seemed full of silence and drifting haze that was partly acridly pungent powder-smoke and partly the dream-cloud of unconsciousness.



WHEN he came back to a knowledge of things, a hard-breathing man, whose eyes glowed, was bending over him and swearing gustily, while he worked at Petee's clothes. When the young man opened his eyes, the other fairly gurgled. He put a big hand on Petee's head and peered down into his eyes.

"God, what a boy!" he said.

The little old lady who had been struck was insensible longer than Petee, but she was not irretrievably hurt. The man with the squint was unconscious longer than either, for four of his ribs were broken, and he went to hospital on his way to jail. Two other bandits were dead, one of those shot by the fellow in the middle of the car who was a real cow-puncher, waiting his chance—and the fifth chap, at the far end of the coach, who had tried to run away and had been met on the platform by a big negro waiter from the diner, next car, who had come out with a bread-knife when he heard the shots, but who had only knocked the bandit off the running car, to die in the rocks alongside. The other chap who was shot and the one Budlong hit with the ax were neither fatally injured, so they accompanied the squinter to hospital and farther.

And Budlong took Petee home to get well and to wonder whether he knew now what courage was. Budlong affirmed rather gulpingly to other friends that his chum was the bravest person of his acquaintance, but Petee decided, conscientiously, that it was not so.

"No," he said, "I wasn't brave; and, at first, I was too scared to feel excited. Afterward I was too mad to be afraid."

Of course, to make all this a really good story, the poor little old lady who happened to be traveling in Petee's car should have turned out to have rich relatives somewhere who would do things for Petee. To be sure,

it is doubtful if she ever really knew just what Petee did, and if she had known she might not have seen any reason for gratitude. And Petee's father was a well-to-do corn-grower, anyhow. Besides, the woman was just what she appeared to be, a poor little old lady who happened to be traveling in Petee's car.



TULARES, big, rough souled and burly, walked back to the guard-house, passed through the group on the porch, and threw his gun surlily into the rack. All week he had been strangely apathetic, morose and vicious by turns, for, oddly, a weight seemed to be pressing down on the top of his head—not *outside* but *inside* the skull.

Therefore, though the place was alive with the tiger-like talk of ribald, saturnine, wholesome young men, which he had always joined readily, he threw himself down on the canvas cot and gazed moodily out the window at the evening murk.

A friendly hand reached through the bars that separated the prisoners' quarters from the squad-room. It tousled his hair affectionately.

"Hello, bunkie," said the owner. "Say, what's eatin' you, hey? You look like the last rose of Summer." Tulares remained

mute, whereupon O'Hearn chuckled, "Come on, now. Come out of the dope. Give us a smile."

"Smile?" Tulares's aggressive flop brought him belly down on the cot. "Who would want to smile in this rotten service?" he demanded, his hot eyes glowing at his bunkie.

O'Hearn drew back a little from those eyes.

"Aw!" he attempted a smile.

"Don't grin at me! Who would want to smile, I say? It's rotten! You know it. I know it. And I'm sick of it, I tell you, the whole rotten business!" The grip of his hands on the bars was as tense as his voice, through which a curious half-whine, half-sob was creeping. "It's rotten," he insisted. "Smell this floor now."

"It's only coal-oil they put on to kill the bedbugs," said O'Hearn. "How'd you get along the last two hours on post?"

"Same as ever, only my horse went lame. But that ain't it. Sure it's coal-oil. Sure it is. I can smell it in my dreams. It's always on the floors. And look here!" He whisked the pillows to one side, disclosing a row of scampering bedbugs at which he struck vindictively. His nostrils arched. "It don't do any good. They're there and always will be. They smell, too, as bad as the coal-oil. Coal-oil and bugs, slum, beans, beef, and sloppy coffee, —! how long do I have to put up with that?"

"First call in the morning, the march and the gun, reveille, assembly, then mess call. Then stables. Then drill. *And* guard mount. *And* mess call. And stable call again in the afternoon so you can groom, groom, groom, till your *caballo's* hide looks like a lookin'-glass. And then retreat again—but what's the use?"

He flung out his hand as petulantly as a child and turned moodily toward the window.

"What's *he* growling about?" sneered a voice on the porch.

"Maybe," snapped Trevors, of Tulares' troop, "maybe you'll learn some day what's a growl and what's not." Jerking his head at Brashares to follow, he arose and went into the squad-room. "Girl, booze, or past history?" he said kindly to Tulares.

"Meaning?"

"What's on your mind?"

Tulares did not turn his head, though a big gulp welled in his breast.

"I don't know, Hugh, I don't know." He passed a hand across his eyes. "Guess it's only a headache. No it ain't, either. I don't know what it is."

"Do you remember the time Stocky kicked the Montescan king at Calabam?" asked the politic Brashares. O'Hearn answered quickly.

"Aw, he never kicked him. 'Twas Snowball Middleton done the kickin'."

But this missionary work was fruitless.

"You needn't to cast any slurs at me," Tulares cut in dully. "Well do I remember kickin' him. But if you say Snowball kicked him, let it go at that. I don't care. I don't care for nothin'! Who would care with that dronin' and dronin' and dronin' around you day after day?"



THEIR eyes followed his pointing hand through the window. There, rising behind the stables, were the first slopes of the purple-shadowed moun-

tains, over which the tropical moon was just now peeping. In its pale light, the tops of the coastal palms stood out in silhouette, nodding and soughing like the dignified plumes of a warrior's head-dress. The call of deer sounded beyond the corrals—then an owl hooted long and dismally, the echoes filtering through the glen and mingling with the distant sounds of the tomtoms beating. Majestic, somber, the scene radiated an impenetrable gloom, and teemed with that mystifying undercurrent of the East—something you can not find a name for, mystery being inadequate, but something you can feel as clearly as the impendency of a storm.

"That's it," continued Tulares, "that drone, drone, drone. And the *lap, lap, lap* of the bay on the beach. And those kettledrums with that soft *boom, boom* comin' stealin' over the hills like a chicken-thief in the night. I tell you it keeps buzzin' in my ears. I'm sick of it all. And it's hot." Reaching for his canteen, he poured a stream on his chest. It seemed to sizzle in the hair as it struck.

"Look at that now! Just like a frying-pan." He looked at Brashares with a glaze in his eyes one sees in a sickened, maddened animal. "Look at it. Then they wonder why men pull out! I tell you what, it's *gettin'* me, Bugs! The same old thing every day and the heat, heat, heat, with never a sight of a decent woman that'll speak to an enlisted man—just Jap girls and muddy-mugged squaws that stink of coconut-oil. If I could just touch the hair of a decent white woman once, I'd be willing to lie down and die!"

Jumping erect now, he began to pace the floor, and even these toughened men were awed by the sight of his face. "Just one touch," he exclaimed, "and if she'd take my hand—I believe I'd die sure. Just one touch of goodness after all this rottenness would choke me for the joy of it. But a soldier! A thirteen-per swattie! What can he expect? I ain't a human any more. I'm just a machine, dronin' my life away out here in Mindanao for Uncle Sammy. And Uncle Sammy is away off there all comfortable with a something to make life worth living—he's got a breath of pure clean air—and *snow*! Do you know what I'd do if I could get into a snow-bank right now? I'd roll and roll in it and rub it in my hair, it would feel so good. I'd roll in it

like a hog, I would—but, pshaw—what's the use of wishing?" And he sat down heavily on his cot.

Out on the porch, the man who had sneered, muttered,

"Guess that ain't growlin'. That's the Filipinitis."

"That's the way Atkinson went," said a neighbor. "Remember?"

"I don't like to."

"And Boltrey. Only he started counting his shirt-buttons—'Poor man, rich man, beggar-man, thief.' Then there was them two hospital cooks, too—they went out, one after the other, and blowed off their heads with the same forty-five. Remember?"

"Aw, shut up," said Brashares, who had now returned to the porch in evident despair of arousing his friend. "You fellows give me the creeps."

"But just think of Tulares getting it!" they returned.

That was the most inexplicable thing about the whole matter. Tulares of all men! Tulares the heavy-weight champion of the regiment, a man with three enlistments behind him, a man to whom barracks spelled "home"! It seemed impossible.

"And yet," sighed Brashares, "if he hasn't got it then I never see it. And he's been sighing all week for something to happen, when heretofore he'd be tickled to get in all the bunk fatigue he could, like any soldier usually does."

Here the returning sergeant gruffly cautioned them to be quiet, and one by one they sought their cots to rest. For a long time Tulares lay gazing at the weather-beaten boards near him, finally dropping into a doze; and it seemed that he had barely closed his eyes when a lantern shone in his face. Sitting up, he flexed his deadened legs, rubbed his sleep-puffed lips, and shuffled to the gun-rack for his gun.

"Only two hours more," said the corporal, slapping him cheerily on the back; but Tulares did not turn his head.

There was something pathetic in the way this strong young giant stumbled into the stifling saddle-rooms, secured his "leather," and saddled his new mount at the picket-line. It seemed that he had been doing it always. Though there was no light save the fitful moon, his hands adjusted saddle, blanket, bridle and cinches swiftly, for he

could have gone through the motions in his sleep.

And Brashares, noting his listless, soul-sick droop as he posted him, swore under his breath again, for he remembered that one Beardsley, laboring under a like dilemma, had walked off his post with all equipments on, and, being easily caught, had suffered a sentence of twelve years in Bilibid. Beardsley had not been popular—but who did not like Tulares?



TULARES, meanwhile, rode on around his beat. This was number four, the closest post to the inland hills, its erratic course taking in the squadron stables and the blacksmith-shops. The special orders covered fire detection, helping up horses who got down in the stalls, and warning the farrier in case of finding a sick horse. Finally, there was that volcano which Mindanao sleeps over, the danger of a Moro who sneaks through the grass in the dead of the night with a six-foot bolo and leaves a bloody form in return for the precious rifle.

To this last, Tulares gave little thought. Aversion to the stinking Moros makes an American horse's nostrils doubly effective, nor does he ever fail to warn the rider. As for the sick horses, they would make enough noise to warn him—the officer of the day was asleep now—hence he was not going to worry much about these monotonous duties.

"It's a farce, anyhow," he told the horse as it stopped to eat grass; "just like riding to a funeral, this goin' round and round again. But come on, now," he added as he listlessly jerked the gray's head up, "we've got to do it anyway—don't forget that."

It was deathly still now, save for the pulsatile tom-toms and the faint stir of the near forests. Even these seemed to intrude hesitatingly and only served to add to, rather than enliven, a gloom as deep as the gurgle of Africa's deepest rivers. Under its spell his mind threatened to slip all the tangible moorings of civilization's clear sanity, for now the growing melancholia of the last week swelled ever deeper away from his friends. That cursed ache—or slight pressure, rather, for it was like no common ache—grew more insistent now between skull and brain, and he shook his dull head as though to throw it off.

"Oh, God," he groaned, "what is this

dullin' and dullin' my head? And when did it commence?" Striving to remember, the days behind him became a maddening blank, the happenings of which recurred but dimly. Even the afternoon spent in a hot saddle "chasing prisoners" seemed to have happened in another world. "Why," he whispered, with face gone gray, "I must be losing my—I must be going *crazy*!" The awful significance of this sunk in on him.

"No!" he cursed suddenly, "I won't go crazy! I won't let myself. But, oh," with a fierce sob, "why don't something happen? It seems a century now since we've had even a hike, let alone a scrap. If the Moros would only attack the post, or if only one of them would get within reach of me so I could get my hands on him! I'd get my hands in his hair and twist the bloody neck off him. I'd tear his heart out! Action! That's what I want. I'd kick his jaw off. I'd stamp on him, and gouge him, and give 'im the butt. I'd tear him straight across the middle, just like that—" and he dug his big fingers into the gray's mane, his eyes glazed and baleful.



HE WAS approaching now a pile of baled hay at the end of K Troop stables, the darkest place on the rounds. To any one with nerves, it would have presented a forbidding aspect, for the beat lay between this pile and the stables, and should any Moro have designs on the rider thereof, here was a propitious place for an attack.

Secreted at a height a little above a mounted man's head, the native's position would have been effective not only for a two-handed downward stroke, but as a means of safety from the dreaded *caballo's* heels as well. But if Tulares thought of this, he did it subconsciously, for he had made the rounds four times now without a tremor from the horse.

"Four times?" he muttered. "Or is it five—or six? Lord, can't I count any more?" Leaning forward, he ran his arm under the horse's mane and buried his face in its depths. "Oh, boy, boy," he half sobbed, "I can talk to you straight out. I'm homesick—so homesick! I ain't no kid, either. But what's this dronin' and dronin' so through my head? What makes my stomach feel so *gone* and my breast feel all lumpy with an ache, ache, ache? It

makes me feel sorry for myself. I could cry, I feel so sorry for myself. I want to go back to God's country where people do something!"

An owl "whoo-hooed" off in the hills.

"Whoo-hoo, you —!" cried. Tulares, straightening, "Come down here within reach of me and I'll whoo-hoo you. God, I can't stand this any longer! I'm going to start something, if I get in jail!" Grasping his rifle, he pulled it out of the boot. "I'm going to start a ruction that'll—"

The sentence was not completed. He had not noticed that they were close to the stack, nor had he noted the continued trembling of his mount, the mincing step, the stiffened ears, the distended nostrils. Before he could grip his loosened seat, the gray had whinnied shrilly, bucked, and thrown him in a sprawling heap on the ground, the rifle, luckily, still retained in his hand. And there on the top of the pile was a naked Moro, sharp-lined against the fleecy sky, a wicked bolo in his hands.

Tulares had landed on all fours facing the Moro, so that his first upturned glance fell on his danger. Instantly his eyes lost the sick glaze. Here was action come like a bolt out of the sky. The hair bristled at the back of his neck. Phantasm left his brain as fog is swept away by the wind, leaving it sharp, alert, quick-acting, keyed to the necessity of the moment as a violin is strung for action.

The first chilling shock of surprise was followed instantaneously by an electric wine like that which filled the veins of his Gallic ancestors, setting his thews like steel, tightening his jaw muscles with murderous lust. Instantly his thumb flopped over the lock on the gun-bolt; but before he could bring the gun to his shoulder the Moro had dropped behind the pile.

This was his opportunity to back away from the pile, firing promiscuously in its general direction as he went, and thus attract the aid of the guard. But this was not possible to Tulares in his present condition. He wanted that Moro. Giving vent to a curse of admiration, he jumped close to the hay. This bronze statue he had seen was nobody's fool to attempt coming to close quarters over a space it would have taken five seconds to cross.

No. Those five possible shots might frustrate his Mohammedan desire to come at this Christian soldier whose death would

place him nearer the right-hand side of Alalah; therefore he would attempt to lure him, and, if that failed, then rush him in the open.

"One wise *hombrel*" Tulares panted. "But two can play at that game." He could hear the pat-pat of the bare feet on the other side. "Going north," leaped through his mind. "Now, if I can get him in the back—" with which he leaped, crouching, to the southern end, peered round the corner—and jumped back as though touched with a live wire. He had come face to face with the Moro for a horrible second; and both native and soldier had acted on the first impulse of surprise and shock.

"Why didn't I pull down on him when I had him that close?" gasped Tulares. He was already in motion following a new inspiration. "I'll get him this time, by the gods!" he swore mentally, stepping up gingerly on the protruding edges of the bales. This time the rifle was held ready with the finger itching at the trigger. One step—three—five—and he was near the top.

Surcharged as he was with suspense, his heart seemed to stop beating, while he held his breath for fear of making the slightest noise. Just one more step and he would be at the top—and then his foot slipped! His right hand slammed down on the hay to catch himself, so that his fingers spread and almost let the gun drop, while his oath was cut short by the sight of a brown face not two feet from his own.



MANY men live and die without ever having the novel experience of living a century in a second. Tulares had many experiences in his memory that did not come under the head of mere existence, but the aspect of that fiendish face was printed indelibly on his mind. The black, knotted hair, the beady, smoldering eyes, the broad, flaring nostrils, the high cheek-bones—Tulares could have painted an exact reproduction of it just as it stared at him there in the moonlight. And most horrible of all was the mouth, opened by surprise, from which the betel-blackened teeth showed grotesquely, while the black juice slavered filthily down his jaw.

A fractional instant thus, with eye glaring into eye, and the Moro recovered in time for an ineffectual slash with the bolo.

But Tulares's blood had raced onward after that one frozen second. He slid precipitously to the ground, shuddering from head to foot.

"I ain't got nerves," he shivered as he raced for the south end once more, "but me and that gent are thinking too much alike to suit me."

Discarding secrecy, he mounted the pile in a furious scramble for the top, arriving there in time to see the Moro running around the north end.

"Got you this time!" he grinned maliciously, and laughed aloud in the night as he cuddled the rifle to his cheek in one swift movement. The belching roar of the big Springfield ripped through the stillness with a crash that awoke the hills.

Struck heavily, the Moro wheeled and snarled like a rat. Staggering, he halted dizzily while the second shot plowed through him; then came on toward the soldier with a cry like that of a bloodhound! He leaped upward with the bolo gripped ready to swing, while Tulares cursed all the humane bullets in Christendom. In the few seconds it took to fire the six shots, he knelt there on the bales with his left arm extended along the barrel, his jaw thrust out pugnaciously, his right hand working spasmodically with bolt and trigger, but just as the Moro breasted the top he stood erect.

"Come on, you ———!" he yelled; then clubbed his gun, swung, and leaped straight at the Moro's face, feet first.

Meanwhile the post was awakening. Horses neighed and snorted in fear down the length of K Troop stables. The stable crews jumped out of bed in panic, scrambling for their pistols. With eyes darting here and there in search of lurking Moros, they came rushing out in their underclothes, while number one at the guard-house, hearing the running horse and the shots, called lustily for the guard.

When Tulares struck the Moro they both rolled to the ground in a snarling, biting, gouging heap. Broken apart by the force of the fall, Tulares bounded to his feet with the resiliency of rubber, faced the leaping Moro, and struck at him wildly with the clubbed gun. Steel met steel. The bolo, landing against the barrel near the bolt, rasped down the gun to the muzzle, nicking the soldier's fingers cruelly.

He was oblivious to this as well as the cut that had laid his chest wide open; his

body was an insensate mechanism through which tingled all the wild surging of the blood lust. The tonic of it frothed to his head, imparted superhuman strength to his flexing muscles. Again they met ferociously. The Moro started a sweeping blow, but the soldier parried it with the barrel, and, stepping in, endeavored to disarm the savage with a smash at the bolo handle.

The Moro sprang back in time, side-stepped, and again put Tulares on the defensive with a cut at his head. It landed on the barrel. Froth flecked from the black mouth now instead of betel-juice. Spitting creamy foam and choking out guttural imprecations, the Moro raised his bolo for a second swing when Tulares' heavy gun-butt struck the handle a blow that snapped it short.



TULARES' next action is history in the squadron. Men who did not see it sometimes scoff at its truth, but those who saw know. The stable crew arrived at this juncture, anxious to get in a shot at the native, but the two were too close together for careless shooting; then, at the instant the bolo handle snapped it was patent that the next moment would see the Moro's brains scattered over the ground by Tulares' gun-butt. Instead, Tulares dropped his rifle and rushed at the Moro with his empty hands.

"Good God!" roared the quartermaster-sergeant, "he'll rip you to pieces with that dagger! Break away, you fool, so we can get a shot at him! Break away, break away!"

But it was too late for Tulares to "break away." Moreover, he did not intend to. His left arm felt the sting of the dagger, but he caught the hand wielding it in a great paw that crushed and doubled the brown fingers out of shape, so that the blade dropped and the two swung and wheeled and crashed back and forth between stables and stack like two raging beasts. Though pierced six times with the high velocity bullets, the Moro fought on, for he was a magnificent specimen of physical manhood—a bronze, wedge-shaped figure of steel-muscled manhood from ankles to head.

His fanatical hatred of Christians and years of carrying packs on his head had given him untold strength and endurance. So for a time, though he coughed blood at every wrench, he threatened to overcome the strongest man in the regiment, while Tulares began to flood sweat from every pore. Then, when his mouth seemed to be filling up with ashes instead of the usual saliva, Tulares gave a great sob. Picking the Moro up bodily, he doubled and crushed him, beat upon his jaw and face with terrific blows, and threw him to the ground, a bloody, misshapen pulp!

"Lemme loose!" he begged to the men who now held him. "I want to kick 'im. I want to——"

But, in his reaction, they held him as they would a child. The guard came pounding round the corner, halting with a clatter.

"What in ——" began the sergeant. "Oh, I see! Did he get you, boy? God, you're all over blood! He musta got you bad." Bending over the Moro, the sergeant exclaimed, "Why, he's breathing a little yet!" and raised his foot to kick him.

"Don't," pleaded Tulares. "I wanted to, but I hadn't oughta said it. That's the —— gamest *hombre* I've seen yet—and he's done for, anyway. But say——" and here he laughed out gladly, "I'm *alive*, do you know that?"

"Of course you are," said the sergeant. "And thank God for that!"

"That ain't what I mean," Tulares grinned weakly. "I'm a—I mean that I'm not just existin' now. I'm a *real live man*!" And he laughed again.

"He's out of his head," said the sergeant. "Hurry up now, we've got to get him to the hospital."

"Just a minute," pleaded Corporal Brashares.

He knelt and looked into his friend's eyes. The light that answered his questing gaze filled him with joy. They were the eyes of the old Tulares. No orbs could have been saner. For a moment he looked deep, while his characteristic whimsical grin grew and struggled with the mist in his eyes—then he arose and looked at the dead savage.

"Thank you, Mr. Moro!" said Brashares.



The Great Raid

A Story of Dick, the Seaman
trained by Doricot

by H.C. Bailey

THERE was complicated war in the Mediterranean Sea. From Gibraltar to Syria the galleys of the Barbary pirates cruised, hunting Christian ships, and plundered and slew abundantly. They in their turn were hunted. The Knights of Malta, who were poor and desperate, found them useful prey. In its portly, respectable fashion, the navy of Genoa did intermittent execution upon them.

The Emperor Charles, when he happened to remember them, would gather armadas. But there was never an end of them. Whenever Christendom was irritated into united endeavor against them, they drew together under Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa, the red-bearded Greek who had made himself King of Algiers and Captain-General of the fleet of the Grand Turk. He was a man to defy the world profitably.

Despite all the perils of piracy, many merchant ships still plied about their business. So the pirates never killed all the geese that laid the golden eggs—and they prospered abundantly. But I think there was never a captain of Algiers or Tunis who made more out of piracy than Dick Rymingtonne in the *Reckoning*.

Do not misjudge him. He was immaculately virtuous. He only plundered the

heathen. No Christian ship was the worse for him. He had too much sense for that. It is plain that he had extraordinary luck in finding pirate galleys full of plunder.

Perhaps it was more extraordinary that he should always have missed them completely till all was over with their prey. Yet his fame in Genoa and Malta was of the noblest. He brought so many slaves back to Christendom and freedom. But the pirate galleys when they labored back to port, battered from the fight, laden deep with spoils, began to keep eager watch to windward for the topmasts of that Bristol ship.

That they never caught her, I do not wonder at all. The pirates, for all their fighting quality, were poor seamen, and their galleys lubberly craft—no match for a ship handy and well handled, with enough of men and arms. The English shipwrights and the English mariners were soon to prove their mastery on better men than the pirates of Barbary.

THROUGH the Bank of St. George at Genoa Dick had sent to Bristol, to Alderman Fry, moneys which surprised that churlish fellow into delight. So you see the *Reckoning*, best found of all ships on that sixteenth-century sea, beat-

IN THE previous stories of "Witless Dick," laid in the time of Queen Elizabeth, it has been made plain that the hulking Berkshire shepherd was anything but witless, despite his seeming stupidity. Having saved Gabriel Rymingtonne from a relative's murderous plot to secure his estates and daughter, Dick assumes the name of Rymingtonne, hints that he will return for the daughter when he has made his fortune, and sets out with a Captain Doricot on a voyage to Egypt, incidentally kidnapping the Bristol alderman who financed the venture. The ship is captured, Doricot dies, the others escape. From that time, Dick sails on his own ship the *Reckoning*.—THE EDITOR.

ing southward of Malta about her old business.

They sighted a carrack that surprised them. She was a gaudy craft, with painted sails and arabesques of gilding about her fantastic hull. Every line of her warranted her a Turk. A child could have told that she was for parade and pleasure, not war. It was vastly strange that such a holiday craft should come sailing west without escort. Dick suspected a trap. But what trap could there be? There was not a galley in sight, and, if there were, they could do little. Open sea and a brisk breeze were not conditions in which they could fight. Dick resolved that there was nothing to fear, crossed her stern and fired at her.

She answered by setting all her canvas and plunged away before the wind. She sailed well enough and her captain understood his business. He kept the masts of the *Reckoning* in a line with his own, so that before Dick could bring a gun to bear he had to put the helm over and stop his ship's way and drop astern.

But the English gunners were not to be denied. They shot away the carrack's mizzen, they made her poop a wreck and she answered her helm no more, fell away and lay helpless, rolling broadside on to wind and swell. The *Reckoning* ran down and grappled her and boarded. It was no long fight. The carrack's crew did well enough and her Captain better than well, lashing with broken scimitar till he was overborne by sheer weight of men.

When they came to pillage the carrack they were something disappointed. She was richly furnished indeed. She might have served for the yacht of the Grand Turk's chief wife. But she had no cargo. There was little profit in her except in the hull itself. With some hesitation—for he preferred to scuttle his prizes—Dick concluded to take her into Genoa. The crew were brought aboard the *Reckoning*, the wreckage was cut away and new gear rigged to the rudder-head. The boatswain, Nick Antony, with half a dozen men took charge of her, and she and the *Reckoning* laid a course northward for Genoa.

Then Dick began to see what he could make of his prisoners. The desperate Captain, a big fellow, swarthy and handsome in the Turkish fashion, would understand nothing and answer nothing. When Dick threatened, his gloomy brow betrayed no

fear or any other feeling save contempt. Some of his crew were as stubborn, some, swearing themselves Christian by birth and heart, pressed to the service of the Turk with torture and fear of death, babbled easily all they knew.

They had sailed from Constantinople with a fleet of galleys under Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa, bound for Algiers. In the squally wind of the day before the fleet was scattered. During the night their carrack had lost sight of its escort. There was not much to help Dick in all that, but they told him one thing more. Their Captain was Dragut Reis!



NOW Dragut Reis was a chief among the lieutenants of Kheyr-ed-Din. If rumor told true, Kheyr-ed-Din valued him more than any man alive and his ransom must be worth many a prize. It was odd, indeed, that he should be caught upon a ship not built for war, but the reason of that mattered little. Kheyr-ed-Din would pay no less for him.

Dragut Reis was unbound and brought to a cabin where they put water and perfumes and purple and fine linen. After a decent interval, Dick came in blue velvet and smiles, and bowed like a courtier (so he says, but I think he flatters himself), and quoth he magnificently,

"Sir, since the fortune of war hath made us shipmates, I beg that I may welcome to my table the most illustrious Dragut Reis."

After a moment Dragut laughed, and it was as if his fierce, handsome face were hidden behind a mask.

"So you have found one of my rascals to blab my name? I hope I may cut the dog's tongue out!"

"Why be at the trouble?" Dick smiled. "To be sure I am glad to know you for what you are that I may treat you as be-seems. And for my part I can't tell why you wouldn't tell."

Again Dragut laughed.

"If you were Dragut Reis, my friend, and a Christian's prisoner, you would not have him know his good fortune."

"There's no man alive need take shame to be taken by Captain Rymingtonne. But 'twixt such as we, 'tis all in the turn of the luck. To-day I'm your host, Signor Dragut; to-morrow your guest, maybe."

"I promise you entertainment!" said Dragut, and his mouth set hard.

"Then enjoy mine. Not for long, I doubt. Barbarossa will pay any money to have you back again."

They were now at table in Dick's cabin.

"If you think I matter to Barbarossa more than a dog, you are mightily wrong." Dick looked up, smiling incredulous surprise as though he heard mock modesty. But he had not missed something of suspicion, something of hostility, in the tone. He did not understand, but it was more important to pretend that he had marked nothing. Dragut went on, "Why, what fancy makes you hope Barbarossa will ransom me?"

"God save us! All Christendom knows you his best lieutenant."

Dragut seemed more at ease. He laughed.

"If you knew Barbarossa you would know that I or any other man alive am worth nothing to him. He needs none of us. We are as dust on his shoes!"

Dick stared. Dick began to look stupid—a sign, if Dragut had known him, that he was growing dangerous.

"Well now," he drawled. "To hear that! Dust on his shoes, quotha! There's what I would never let any man think of me."

"My good friend," Dragut sneered, "if ever you meet Barbarossa—as I much hope—he will teach you to endure many things."

"Well, well, maybe I could teach him a thing and a half," Dick drawled and gave a fatuous laugh.

Dragut, as it seems, wrote him down a fool and they did not make good company. Dragut maintained the sullen, ferocious temper natural to his situation. Dick was stupid and boastful. When they parted he felt confident that Dragut no longer suspected him of suspecting anything. He paced the deck, giving his whole mind to discover what there was to suspect.



DRAGUT had been startled by Dick's assurance that Barbarossa would pay high for his ransom. Why? It was plainly to be expected. Every day prisoners were bought back to freedom by Christian and Moor, and so famous a Captain as Dragut must be sought whatever the price. Dragut wished Dick to believe that Barbarossa cared nothing for him. Why? All the world knew that he was the best of Barbarossa's lieutenants.

Had he quarreled with his master? Would he have to pay his own ransom? Or was

there some deeper mystery? Why had he been sailing in a pleasure ship without guns or fighting men? Because Barbarossa had cast him off? But he had been sailing with Barbarossa and a whole armada in escort. They had not quarreled then. He was still Barbarossa's man. There was some deeper mystery. Dick laughed to himself as he watched the captured ship plunging in the wake of the *Reckoning*. The pirates had given him an alluring puzzle to unravel, and it was likely that he had made a pestilent puzzle for them.

The wind rose again before nightfall, and after dark it grew stormy. The *Reckoning* made good enough weather of it, but when dawn came, pale gold over a sea all black and gray, her prize was not to be seen. For some hours they beat about, seeking her in vain. Then over the horizon came the masts of a fleet, Barbarossa's armada. To linger was to be lost. The *Reckoning* set her course for Genoa again. But Dick glowered at the sea. It was too likely that his prize and his men had fallen to Barbarossa: the carrack, no very seaworthy craft at her best and battered from the fight, might well have been disabled by the night's storm and left a helpless prey.

He cursed himself for wasting men aboard her. But he had not thought that in such weather the galleys could keep together on a course. Perhaps there were better sea boats than galleys in that fleet. It loomed large upon the horizon, a rare armada—another mystery indeed. But there was nothing to be done against it. He set all the sail he dared carry, and soon the Moorish masts dropped out of sight again.

At dinner Dragut met him with a sneer.

"So you have not taken much by your pains, Sir Christian."

Dick scratched his head and gave a silly guffaw.

"I have taken you at the least. D'ye know, I think I'll keep you."

Which did not make Dragut more amiable.

They had no more adventures till the crowded houses of Genoa rose tier upon tier above them and they anchored inside the Molo Vecchio. Then Dick took order with Dragut Reis.

"By your leave, you'll keep your cabin till I hear of ransom for you."

Dragut scowled at him.

"Here's a cowardly caution. Should I grow wings and fly to Barbary?"

Dick grinned.

"Aw, you be a great man, to be sure, and who knows? So you'll please to keep your cabin."

And so to a cabin Dragut was kept, with a guard at the door day and night, and none of the prisoners was let ashore, and Dick waited.

II

H E WAS, I suppose, impatient, though he does not confess to impatience in all his life. He desired anxiously to save his boatswain alive, and I believe that was his chief concern. He had no doubt that Barbarossa would count Dragut worth many boatswains. He waited for Barbarossa to move.

If he was feeling loyal and affectionate, you would suppose that he might have moved himself. There were indeed ways of sending a message to Algiers. He could make a shrewd guess which of the respectable merchants of Genoa was Barbarossa's agent.

But if he seemed eager to get his boatswain, the boatswain would be all the harder to get. Also, the market value of Dragut would fall. I do not believe Dick cared for that. But if he seemed eager, if he rushed to make terms, there was no chance of making Barbarossa show his hand and betray something of the mystery of Dragut and the armada. For that he did care. He had resolved to get his finger into Barbarossa's mysterious pie. And so he waited.

He had a week to wait. It was one of the four times in his life which saw his steady nerves grow troublesome. At the end of a week on a morning early a boat came alongside, and in it, much becloaked, was the reverend form of Alessandro Montaldi. Dick inspected him through a port-hole and grinned satisfaction.

"It is you, is it?" he said to himself. "And the devil of a time you ha' kept me waiting!"

So he let Signor Montaldi wait half an hour for him. Montaldi was the man he had guessed Barbarossa's agent.

Montaldi had repute in Genoa as heir to an old and honorable name. He had inherited little else. He was understood to do business, like his ancestors, with the East, but any who sought business with him found him evasive. Yet he contrived to live in state. He was everywhere honorably re-

ceived. He was popular among the seamen and common folk. There was no scandal against him.

Even in the permitted traffic of ransoming Moorish slaves with which all the other Eastern merchants meddled at whiles, he was never concerned. But for all his high family and his good repute, the little company who without ostentation ruled trade and policy kept him out of their intimacy.

Dick had him brought below by men who, knowing no more than a word or two of anything but English, could answer no questions. They were told to leave him alone in Dick's cabin. When Dick came in silently, he was sitting by Dick's papers. Dick smiled at him benignly. There was nothing in them that could serve him. But some of them were still quivering.

"I do hope you ha' not been dull," said Dick. "If I had known of your coming, I would not ha' been busy."

Montaldi bowed—he was a grave, austere man—doubted not that Dick had many matters on hand.

"A sea-captain's always busy," said Dick and waited.

"And you have been prosperously of late," Montaldi smiled.

"Have I to be sure?" Dick's face grew stupid. "Then you know more than I."

"Why, sir, it's common talk you have a rich bevy of prisoners."

"Have you come to buy them?"

Montaldi laughed.

"By what I hear they're slaves that will sell."

"That's more than I hope. A crew of lubbers and renegades."

"A renegade may fetch his price."

"Come, I ha' no time for talk. Do you bid for 'em?"

"What, without seeing them? My good sir, how can I tell what they're worth?"

"Then you may go back ashore again. I have no time for haggling. I sail to-night."

Montaldi betrayed some agitation.

"Why, then—you drive a hard bargain—I bid you fifty ducats a head for all you have."

It was a good price for slaves; too good for slaves a man had not seen.

"And what might you be wanting with slaves?" said Dick. "You ha' no galleys that ever I heard."

"I do not buy for myself. But what is that to you if the ducats are good?"

Dick grinned.

"Why, my lad, I doubt your ducats come from Barbary. Out with it. I know why you are here."

Montaldi cried out.

"What do you mean? You think I have a commission to ransom them?"

"Ay, I think that and more. Now what do you bid? Remember, I sail to-night."

"Let me see them first."

"Not a man. And I sail to-night!"



MONTALDI protested nervously. It was idle to think of doing business so. He could swear that Dick would never make so much of them from any other man. The whole affair was in his hands.

"No doubt of that, my lad. I know you are Barbarossa's man."

Montaldi was frightened. After a moment he began to talk on a high note about folly and insolence and his noble family.

"I ha' no time," Dick cried out. "If you come here from Barbarossa, you can stay; if not, get over the side."

"You talk so wildly!" Montaldi protested. "It is but a matter of buying them back—an every-day matter."

"Tis not every day Barbarossa buys back Dragut Reis. What do you bid?"

Montaldi gasped a little. It was plain that he had hoped Dick would not know his prisoner.

"If you have Dragut Reis—if he is unhurt—my friends would pay a thousand ducats."

Dick laughed.

"Well, well, there is plenty of time. Barbarossa will go higher than that in a month or two."

"A month or two!" Montaldiechoed, and Dick saw that time was matter of importance. He was getting near the mystery.

"Ay, you can come and bid again when I am back from my cruise at the end of the Summer."

"No, no," Montaldi gave a nervous laugh. "Let us have done now. Come, I can pay you two thousand to have him free at once."

"Barbarossa's in a mighty hurry for him," Dick said. "Nay, my lad, I'll take my time. Barbarossa has some men of mine. Had you heard of it?" Montaldi shook his head. "Well, they are no great account, but I'll not let Dragut go till I have them safe again."

"I never heard of your men," Montaldi cried petulantly.

"Well, wait till you do."

"But I tell you Dragut must be free at once."

Dick whistled.

"It takes two to put must to that, my lad. And I want my men first."

"And I tell you we know nothing of your men."

"Do you not, now?"

Dick grinned cunning incredulity to annoy Montaldi. But he was not the least incredulous. If the captured ship had fallen again to Barbarossa, it was inconceivable that Montaldi should not have heard of it; inconceivable that Barbarossa should not think of its crew as worth something in a bargain for Dragut. They might have been killed, perhaps. Or perhaps the battered carrack had been sunk in storm or fight. It was plain that Montaldi knew nothing.

He chattered nervously again.

"There are ten thousand slaves and more in the galleys at Algiers. Maybe there is a man of yours among them. How can I tell? How can I find them? But Dragut Reis is no common seaman. You can not think to keep him captive. You——"

"I think you be no judge what I can think," Dick chuckled. "If you're in so vast a hurry, send me to Barbarossa. Let me find my men out of his bagnios and bring them safe away, and he may have Dragut for two thousand ducats."

"You—you would go to Barbarossa—to Algiers?" Montaldi stared.

Dick grinned.

"D'ye think I'll be safe enough while my fellows have Dragut here? If he be worth two thousand ducats, he is worth a ducat and a half more than me alive or dead."

Montaldi's mind was overwhelmed. Feebly he began again at the beginning and repeated himself at length. They came back to the same conclusion. Dick would agree to nothing but that he should go to Algiers and bargain with Barbarossa himself. Montaldi was annoyed with him, visibly suspected him of some secret purpose, the hope of some secret profit, and tried all weapons from menace to mockery to prevent him.

His horror, his alarm, were to Dick's mind excessive. For a man to go among the

Moors on some business of ransom was no miracle. Why should Montaldi make such trouble about it? He was certainly in a rare hurry to have Dragut free and for Dick to go to Algiers must mean delay. But there seemed to be something else that irked him. He suspected Dick of something. For some reason he wanted to keep Dick away from Algiers. Dick was the more resolute to go. Montaldi yielded with a bad grace. He did not dare to refuse the only way to Dragut's freedom, but could not conceal that he feared it.

Montaldi protested that he could give no safe-conduct, that Barbarossa was more likely to have Dick cut asunder than bargain with him, and Dick answered that unless he came safe back from Algiers Dragut Reis would never see Algiers again. Montaldi declared that he knew no way of getting passage to Algiers, and Dick grinned and advised to find one.

III

 WITH prisoners always to be bought and sold, there was of course a steady clandestine traffic between Genoa and Algiers, and both men knew it. Dick was put aboard a felucca, which called itself a fishing-boat and owned a crew whose race was a mystery. It sighted more than one galley which let it pass unchallenged, and it brought Dick safe into the harbor of Algiers.

The crew, which had been surly, became truculent then. They landed him guarded as if he had been a prisoner and marched him like a prisoner past the forts and the bagnios, and through the narrow white streets to the castle on the hillside where Barbarossa held his court. There were half a score of them armed about him from the moment he landed till he was given over to a captain of Barbarossa's guard. But for all their care and their haste he had seen that the harbor was full of galleys, the town of soldiery. It was confirmed that Barbarossa had some great scheme in hand.

His letter of credence was taken from him. He was led to a guard-room and searched for weapons.

"You be feeling timid, seemly," grinned Dick.

"The last Christian who came on an errand to Barbarossa we flung to the hooks," quoth the Captain.

"Why, did he dare laugh at you?"

"Wait your turn," said the Captain carelessly.

There was not long to wait. With two men on either side and two behind he was led across a garden, rich but unkempt, down a marble arcade elaborate and half built, and into the presence of Barbarossa.

Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa had been a fine figure of a man. He was shrunken and enfeebled. Yet his eyes, gleaming beneath a thicket of eyebrows, preserved their fire. He lounged upon a heap of cushions, all in white from turban to shoe. A lean hand fretted at his girdle. The beard that hid most of his face was red no more, but tawny grey and white. His right hand moved about his mouth in the manner of weakening age.

Dick nodded at him cheerily.

"God bless you, how's all with you?"

Barbarossa stared—the fidgety hands fell still—he was like an animal waiting to spring. He flung an order at Dick's guards and they fell back and away. The huge negro at Barbarossa's side, all but naked, with simitar unsheathed in his hand, stayed where he stood. Barbarossa beckoned Dick nearer.

"What do you want of me, Christian?" he said in a cold, sneering voice.

Dick shrugged.

"Nought to keep you awake o' nights."

"If you palter with me I will have you cast upon the hooks."

There was no sound but the laughter of a fountain and the negro's heavy breathing.

Dick made a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, you talk like an old woman frightening children."

The old man quivered a little.

"Would you yelp at me, dog?" he muttered.

Dick began to laugh. He had never, I take it, much appetite for the terrific, and this old man was too absurdly like an angry cat.

The old man stammered something. His eyes were dim and bloodshot. He made signs in the air. The negro started forward, heaving up his simitar. Dick sprang on him. For a while they swayed together, straining, stamping, panting. Barbarossa cried out, and the negro let his simitar fall and hurled himself free. Dick put a foot on the simitar and stood disheveled and panting.

"That was not ill done," said Barbarossa quietly. "You are English, they say?" Dick nodded. "They are strong cattle, the English, but only cattle, for what I know. You are the Captain of that square-rigged ship which hunts my galleys? She sails well. You fight her well. You have taken many of my galleys, I think?" Dick laughed. "One off Tangier last Summer. That was the first. Two by Bizerta in the Autumn. One out of Corinth at sea and one off Brindisi. She was rich."

Dick laughed again:

"And a carrack on the high seas. She had Dragut."

Barbarossa showed no sign of anger.

"You have done well," he said quietly. "You may do far better." Something of a smile flashed for a moment in the fierce eyes. "You are as good a Christian as the rest, Englishman? It would cost you nothing to spit on the cross?"

"What's your will?" said Dick lazily.

"If you were a captain of mine, you could count your gains ten times over. Bring your ship and I will give you another such and ten galleys under your flag, and the half of all they win you. And if you be what I think you, I will make you such another as Dragut!"

"We're not talking business," said Dick.

Barbarossa raised himself a little on the cushions.

"You mock at me, Englishman?" Dick nodded genially. "I tell you you may be rich and powerful as one of your Christian kings!"

"And live like a hog in a sty. I've a home in England."

Barbarossa laughed.

"Dog, what is home? I was born to a home in a seaman's cottage. Home is where you have power and pleasure."

"You're a poor heathen," said Dick.

Barbarossa looked over his shoulder. The negro flung himself upon Dick. Barbarossa cried out and the soldiers came running.

"Have him flogged," he said coldly.

As he was haled out, "It don't help you to Dragut," Dick laughed.

gave them, I infer, little trouble. He seems to have been surprised by the weakness of the men with the rods. Or he pretends so. But he speaks bitterly of the prison into which he was flung afterward—a cell no bigger than a coffin and of horrible fetor. Perhaps you expect him to have been regretting that he was ever such a fool as to come to Algiers. I do not find that he ever confessed to this.

Some time in the next day—he had been left without food or drink—he was haled out and brought again to Barbarossa. It was the same scene. The old man lay still on his cushions as if he had not moved. He showed some grim amusement at Dick's dirt and disarray.

"Have you come to your senses, Englishman?"

"I never lost them. Nor my temper neither."

Barbarossa waited a moment.

"The last messenger I flogged had his will of them that flogged him the day after." He paused. "The one before, I watched as he was sawn asunder." Dick said nothing. "I wonder which way you choose."

"I wonder how all this tomfooling is going to help you to Dragut."

"What do I care for Dragut?"

"To be sure you know best." Dick laughed.

"Will you take service with me?"

"If I be not back in Genoa in two weeks Dragut is dead."

"If you will not take service with me you will never see Genoa again. That is how much I care for Dragut."

Dick began to laugh.

"You fool, do you think my fellows are to kill him quietly? If I be not back they put him to torture."

Barbarossa stirred on his cushions.

"Torture?" he repeated, and Dick marked a change in his voice. "I also can use torture, Englishman."

"To be sure. And what can I tell if you do? But Dragut Reis could tell a deal about you! They would be glad to hear all your plans, the Genoese."

"You are a fool," said Barbarossa in a low voice.

Dick laughed.

"Did you think me such a fool as to come here without a sure hold on you?"

"What is your malice against me?"

"God bless you, none. I want nought but



IF HE had been a man of heroic pride doubtless he would have made a desperate fight of it, chosen death rather than the ignominy of a beating. This does not seem to have occurred to him. He

your ducats. Three thousand for Dragut and any men of mine you have in the bagnios."

"I have no man of yours. You are a fool." Dick stared at him. He was plainly honest enough. So the boatswain and his crew had not been taken. They were not in the game. "You are a fool," Barbarossa repeated. He seemed distressed as for a friend who would not hear reason. "Join with me and you may be great as any man I have. Who knows—you might be my heir. I have not seen a man in many years who——"

There was something so melancholy about him that Dick had to laugh again.

Barbarossa fell back on his cushions.

"Go your way, dog. We will hunt you down, my wolves and I. I promise myself your flaying."

"I thought you would bleed," said Dick with a grin.

"They shall pay you in Genoa," Barbarossa said, and Dick saw his broken yellow teeth. "They shall pay you in Genoa!"

IV



SO THAT day the felucca sailed again. For once Dick seemed to have been bewildered. The swift dismissal after all the queer delay startled him. The whole affair was fantastic, unreal, like a dream or a ballad. To Dick's cold, practical, northern mind the antics of Barbarossa were inhuman. For a little while it seems he began to fear that he was fighting against a creature incalculable. But it was not in him to be afraid long. He began to count up profit and loss. He had done his duty by the boatswain, Nick Antony. But Antony was lost, after all. It was some consolation doubtless to have put a thousand ducats more on the price of Dragut. Yet I think Dick was less pleased with himself than usual.

The felucca made a good run. Before sunset on the fifth day they saw the Alps again. By night they came into Genoa harbor and Dick was set ashore. In the early morning he was rowed out to the *Reckoning*, and there, lying astern of her, he saw the captured carrack, and laughed and swore and laughed. The affair was mocking at him, designed by Providence to display him a fool. Doubtless he would shortly find Barbarossa's armada marshaled to

go and catch tunnies. He swore considerably.

The boatswain was hailed and came aboard to breakfast. He did not seem to find himself surprising or ridiculous. He greeted Dick coldly and with some contempt.

"Well, I never thought to see you again. Going mare's-nesting among the heathen!"

"Nor I you, Nick."

The boatswain spat.

"More fool you," quoth he. "And to go off to Algiers now! There's foolishness. To throw a young head after gray hairs. Oh, 'tis wicked!"

He was with some difficulty persuaded to tell his tale, which was very long and very technical, but may be here brief. The carrack had lost her foremast in the storm, could not keep her course, had run before the wind and hardly made Malta. There they found her in parlous case, and only after weeks of labor patched her up to venture the voyage to Genoa.

His tale was hardly told before Montaldi was announced. He was transfigured. He revealed himself effusively genial. He spluttered congratulations and flattery. He was hardly to be diverted to business, and when he came to business was merely anxious to pay. There was to be no haggling, no difficulty. He heard that Barbarossa desired only to be the best of friends with Dick. He had the three thousand ducats with him.

There was nothing for it but to finish the affair. The money was paid. Dragut was conducted with ceremony to the boat. Even he seemed to have imbibed some joviality. He went over the side with a bow and a laugh, and "To our next meeting."

Montaldi lingered with more smooth words. He hoped to do more good business with Dick. He hoped they might be friends. He coveted a better acquaintance. He begged that Dick would sup with him. And Dick agreed, and, all smiles, he departed.

"Why's there so much oil to him?" quoth the boatswain.

Dick chuckled.

"I'll tell you after supper."



ALL that day he was busy rummaging the carrack, but there he found nothing to interest or enlighten him. She had among her charts, which were scanty, a map of the Italian seaboard from Na-

ples to Leghorn drawn in great detail. That surprised him a little, but he could not think it significant of anything. He went pensively to Montaldi's supper.

The one thing important about that was Montaldi's eagerness to make him come. Many explanations were possible. Montaldi might have orders from Barbarossa that persuasion and blandishment should be used to win him over. That was the least likely. Montaldi might have orders for kidnapping. That was possible. So Dick had a party of his men surround the house at a little distance. Montaldi might have orders for poison. That was most likely of all. Barbarossa was not likely to forego revenge, or once he had Dragut safe, put it off. And it was an age which for both business and pleasure used poison freely.

Dick entered the too hospitable house with a languid air, and when Montaldi rushed upon him apologized for ill health, feared to be bad company, but had not liked to break his promise. Montaldi was altogether correct; regretted, sympathized, thanked and applauded him for coming, and was solicitous for his comfort. Dick was conducted into a little gorgeous room glittering with crystal and gold, fragrant of flowers and rare fruits. A servant bowed them to table and glided out. Then Dick sat down heavily and appeared to suffer.

"Give me leave," he groaned. "I doubt I can eat nothing. I was in the wrong to come."

Montaldi was properly startled, consoled, remonstrated, offered delicacies and vaunted them innocent enough for a baby. But Dick would have nothing, not even wine; begged Montaldi not talk of it, for the very thought was painful, but go on with his own supper.

"In charity let's talk of something not food," and with the nervous haste of a man ill at ease within, Dick began to talk of Barbarossa.

It was at this point that Montaldi's behavior began to be strange. He might well have packed Dick off to his ship, he might have complained of his coming in such a state, he might have been angry at such disgust for his fare. But it was not natural that he should sit down to eat and eat nervously and drink deep, and in the midst of uneasy answers still press wine on his unpleasant guest. After a while he sprang up.

"I have it! Ah, fool that I was not to

think of it before! I have a wine from Vesuvius, a very nectar, a cordial of the rarest."

He bustled to the sideboard. There were, you remember, no servants in the room.

Dick protested feebly, languidly. But Montaldi, busy with the wine and glasses, chattered on. He was busy a long time. He came back with one glass brimming and pressed it into Dick's hand.

"Nay, I will not be denied. I protest it is the very elixir of life. Drink it off, my friend, and you will be your own man again. As hungry as I. Come, pledge me."

Dick took the glass, laughing weakly.

"Well, do me reason," he said.

"With good will," cried Montaldi, and went back for the bottle and filled another glass.

Dick rose unsteadily to his feet and lurched forward. Then his hand fell on Montaldi's shoulder. He put his glass down on the window-sill.

"Change glasses!" he said sharply.

Montaldi trembled under his hand. Montaldi's face was white, and he stammered something.

Dick thrust him away and pushed the window open and shouted to his men waiting outside:

"Call the watch!"

"You are mad!" Montaldi cried, and his teeth chattered.

Dick laughed, and shifted his chair and sat down in front of his glass and the window.

"You have tried to poison me, my lad, and the watch is coming. I shall give them that glass of poisoned wine and tell them that you gave it me because you are hired by the King of Algiers and a traitor to Genoa. Or else—or else you will tell me for what Barbarossa means his armament, and give me all his letters to you this last two months."

"It is a lie!" Montaldi stammered.

"Then drink off the wine," Dick laughed. Montaldi shrank away. "So. Then you can tell the watch and tell the Council—they love you, do they not?—who bade you poison me."

Montaldi rushed at him madly, was easily caught and flung down on the floor. Outside in the street was the tramp of a march. Montaldi staggered to his feet.

"I will tell you; I will tell you!" he cried. "But you will say nothing! Swear that you will say nothing to any man!"

"The truth and the letters," Dick grinned. And he leaned back to the window and cried to his men: "Hold them in talk!"

"I will tell you," Montaldi gasped. "It is Julia Gonzaga."

"The letters," Dick said, and Montaldi rushed out. He came back panting with a few papers and Dick turned them over and saw enough. He stood up laughing. "And so good night and pleasant dreams."

Montaldi clung to his arm.

"Swear you will never let Barbarossa know of this!"

"Not I," Dick laughed. "You are too useful, my friend," and out he went and with some ducats easily persuaded the watch that his men had mistaken him when he merely bade them be on the watch for him.

V



ALL the mystery was plain enough at last—plain as you may read it in solemn historical prose. Julia Gonzaga, the widowed Duchess of Trajetto, was famed to half the world the most beautiful woman in it. Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa desired to commend himself to the Sultan Soliman who had just made him Admiral by capturing her for the Sultan's harem—a delectable conquest, a magnificent insult to all Christendom. For her the carrack had been destined. For the raid to capture her, Dragut Reis, Barbarossa's best captain, was needed. For her the armada was gathered.

She made her home at Fundi, near the coast by Gaeta. The plan of the raid was clear in the letters to Montaldi, but without the letters Dick could have guessed it, once he knew the object. The armada would pounce upon Gaeta and seize harbor and town. Then two thousand men with Dragut to lead were to march on the castle of Fundi.

Before dawn the *Reckoning* had put to sea. Dick counted that he had more than time enough to reach Gaeta and warn the Duchess of her danger and let her call the countryside to arms or fly. He was wrong. The winds were contrary. They served Barbarossa. And Barbarossa had lost no time. His armada had waited Dragut off Naples. As the *Reckoning* steered in toward the low coast of the Pontine Marshes her lookout saw a fleet on the horizon. Dick cursed all earth and heaven. There were, I suppose, not many things in his life

which he desired so much as triumph over Barbarossa. That flogging rankled more than he admits.

He had something to fear. The pirate fleet might snap him up if he did not turn and run. He had little to hope. The pirates were already close upon Gaeta, and it was idle to think that they might be beaten off. He swore, it seems, like a madman, but his head was clear enough and his will resolute. The armada was not likely to concern itself with one lonely ship. There was still a chance that he might get to Fundi first. He altered course for the little harbor of Terracina. Then the wind failed.

Just at dark a boat of wearied men landed him on the strand to south of Terracina and he bought a horse at an inn and galloped through the night. He found the servants at Fundi out watching firelight in the sky to southward. They had heard cannon at sunset and babbled joyous amazement. With a word of the truth he set them shrieking, and like sheep they ran. He broke into the castle, and for a while, raging, could find none who could tell him of the Duchess. Each of the frantic household thought only of flight.

He stormed through dark galleries roaring her name and varied oaths. At last a woman in her night-gear ran into his arms, and while he scolded her and shook her and cursed her because she would not go for her mistress, she gasped out that she was the Duchess herself! He flung her on his shoulder and ran for the courtyard.

In the panic in the courtyard he fought three men for a mule and won it, and thrust her on and broke away. The crowd was running inland to the hills. He struck for the marshes and the sea.

As dawn broke over the strand by Terracina, a shivering, sobbing woman was tossed into a boat. When she said anything that was articulate and not a prayer, it was to promise impossible wealth if only they would let her go. Thirty hours after, as the *Reckoning* ran northward through the sunshine, a woman, piquantly beautiful in doublet and hose, laughed the story down the wind.

"And I was to be the Grand Turk's chief wife! Ah, signor, never, never may I forgive you."

When Dick came back from his next cruise he heard that the Signor Montaldi had been stabbed in the streets. And none knew the murderer.

A CASE for the BIG STICK



BY
MAX RITTENBERG
An Episode in the
Career of a Gentle
-man of Fortune

WHEN, in the early nineteen hundreds, John Hallard planned to annex the Ascot Gold Cup, he mentally starred one feature of the scheme that seemed audaciously simple and effective.

The famous cup in his possession, he had no intention of running off with it himself or despatching it by motor-car in the trust of an accomplice. No, he would simply bury it in the grounds of "Wellwood," Lord Craythorpe's house adjoining the race-course, and leave it there for a year or so until the hue and cry had completely died away. Then he could unearth it in peace and quietness and take it away to be melted down into a salable commodity.

Many months ago he had cultivated Lord Craythorpe's acquaintance with this end in view, and now he and Renie were guests at the Ascot Week house-party at "Wellwood." They were still in the "Sir Ralph Kenrick" and "Lady Kenrick" stage of their career, since the episode here to be set out was prior to that memorable fiasco at Rovecq which definitely wiped "Sir Ralph" out of practical use as an alias. On that unlucky day all the carefully built-up fabric of personality had to be thrown on the scrap-heap— But in this I am anticipating. At the time of the Ascot Week of 1903 Sir Ralph Kenrick, dilettante young man of leisure, had a definite place in English society.

Hallard was working his way softly through the heavily wooded grounds of

"Wellwood" late at night. He was seeking a likely place for his *cache*. His feet were rubber-shod; in his hand was an ingeniously contrived telescopic spade which could be hidden easily under one's coat.

As he stepped catlike between the great boles of the beeches and oaks, eyes alert for the exactly right place in which to make a burying-place for the Gold Cup, a sound of whispering near at hand drew him up sharply.

With every muscle tense, he crouched in the shadow of a giant oak and strained his ears to listen. Had some one got wind of his plan? Were they waiting to surprise him?

But the first words that came to him with clearness drove that thought completely away. It was a woman's voice—a voice with tears in it—and it said:

"Give me it back. Please give me it back! Surely you must see what it means to me?"

"My dear girl, I tell you I can't manage it at present!" came the reply in a man's voice harsh with annoyance.



HALLARD knew the man at once by the voice. It was Lambert, Claude Lambert, the famous cricketer, one of the house-party, and a man that Hallard loathed and abominated from the depths of his being. For the matter of that, there were few men at "Wellwood" who could do more than tolerate the fellow. Women everywhere went crazy over Claude

Lambert, with his Apollo-like handsomeness, his brilliant record as a cricketer, and his carefully studied insolence of manner. Men everywhere itched to kick him.

But he was a natural cricket genius—had been so as a boy when he gained his school colors at the exceptionally early age of fifteen; carried his skill into the Oxford eleven in his freshman year; and now played for his county ostensibly as an amateur, but in reality as a paid player. The magic name of "cricketer" smoothed the path for him everywhere in English society. It gave him the right to ride roughshod over the feelings of other men not gifted with his peculiar skill.

Old Lord Craythorpe, well-meaning but strangely short-sighted, had invited Lambert to captain his house-party team in the annual match against a neighboring house-party. Hypnotized by the magic name of "cricketer," Craythorpe saw his guest as a splendid acquisition, and mentally plumed himself on having persuaded the famous Claude Lambert to honor "Wellwood" with his presence for Ascot Week.

Hallard had no compunction in listening further to the very private conversation on which he had unwittingly intruded. The words he had just overheard were a cross-section into a woman's soul—a woman who needed help. Though he was admittedly a crook, there ran as a thread in the character of John Hallard a quixotism which now fired him with a sudden resolve to hear further.

To hear so that he might help, if perchance his help were possible. For the moment, the tears in the woman's voice had driven the Ascot Gold Cup completely out of his thoughts. He quickly took out of an inner pocket a microphone which he always carried with him as a professional help and adjusted it to his ear.

With the microphone in position, the whispered conversation behind the neighboring oak came quite clearly to him:

"To-night, my husband asked me again why I am not wearing it."

"You can make some excuse or other."

"I've been making excuses for a week or more. To-night I had to say the pendant was at a jeweler's in town, being repaired. I had to say it was promised for Wednesday."

"Why on earth did you say that?"

"Claude, you must give me it back. You

must! My husband suspects something. He looked at me so strangely to-night, as if he were boring into my thoughts."

"You ought to be a match for an old clod like that. Where's your woman's wit?"

In answer to that cowardly taunt came a flush into the voice of the woman:

"When I lent you the pendant, it was to clear you of your debts. You told me that in a month or so you would be straight again and let me have it back. I believed you. I believed you because I loved you. I lent you the pendant freely and willingly. Claude, it is a debt of honor!"

There was a rustling of paper as though the man were drawing a document out of his pocket, and Lambert replied:

"Look here. 'Lent to Thomas Smith, one thousand pounds on the security of black pearl pendant bordered with eight brilliants. Interest so-and-so.' Your pendant's safe enough. As soon as I can scrape the money together, I'll get it back for you. But just now the thing's a sheer impossibility. I haven't got the money. I can't get the money this week unless I make it at racing or cards or billiards. Wait till next week, and then we'll see."

"I must have it to wear on Wednesday night! Claude, Claude, won't you try to realize what this means for me? If by Wednesday the pendant is not back, my husband will write to the jeweler I said was repairing it, and then——!"

"Tell him you've pawned it to pay your bridge debts. Or your milliner's bill. Or something. Stall him off for a week."

"I can't do it. He would dig into every lie I invented. I can't do it. Please, *please* give me it back!"

"Now look here, Nita——"

Nita! That would be Mrs. Dennison. John Hallard squared his jaw as he realized who the woman was. Little Nita Dennison, who had stood by Renie when the D'Arcy Colville crowd had tried to cold-shoulder her two years ago. That was a debt to repay, thought John Hallard, a double reason why he should intervene.

But what could be done? At all costs, Mr. Dennison, a coarse-bred, sullen, jealous husband, must be kept in ignorance, and that precluded any open intervention. Publicity could not hurt Lambert a hundredth part of the hurt it could bring to Nita Dennison. Every woman would have

excuses for the handsome, dashing cricketer, but none for Nita Dennison.

Thinking with tense concentration, Hallard lost the remainder of the whispered conversation. Lambert came from behind the tree and strode away through the darkness, slashing viciously with his cane at the undergrowth.

And presently there came the sound of a woman's sobbing. Hallard gritted his teeth and crept away.



COMPLETELY gone were the thoughts of the Ascot Gold Cup. All the faculties of his mind had switched over to the problem of how he could recover that black pearl pendant for Mrs. Dennison by Wednesday evening. To-night was Monday—that gave two days for action.

First, he had to find where the pendant was in custody. Probably with some Bond street jeweler acting as an aristocratic pawnbroker. In any case the jewel would only be given up against delivery of the receipt from which Lambert had read out, and that made it imperative to get possession of the receipt.

To approach Mrs. Dennison was obviously out of the question. To approach Lambert directly would merely precipitate an open scandal. Hallard knew his man through and through. The interview he had just overheard had brought the fellow's inner cur to daylight.

A plan simple and clean-cut flashed upon him. He would get into Lambert's room while the latter was asleep; find the receipt; redeem the pledge with his own money; and then trust to "holding up" Lambert for a repayment.

In the dead of night John Hallard crept through corridors to the cricketer's bedroom and gently turned the handle.

The door remained fast! For some obscure reason Lambert had locked it from the inside.

Hallard squared his jaw and went back to his own room for a set of skeleton keys. He was going to take a risk that in all his dare-devil career he had never ventured before—to burgle the room of a fellow guest at a house-party. In view of the risk of detection, it was sheer madness.

But fired by his quixotic purpose, Hallard cared nothing for possible consequences. He crept back to the cricketer's

room, picked the locked door, entered softly and began to run systematically through the pockets of the sleeping man.

Only to find nothing!

For some reason of his own, Lambert had locked the receipt away in a safe place.

The sleeping man muttered in his sleep, sat up in bed, rose and switched on the light. Hallard had quickly slipped underneath the bed and, hidden by the valance, remained there, holding his breath.

It was a moment tense with anxiety, but it passed without detection. Claude Lambert had risen to read through some love-letters with a satisfied smirk. Presently he returned to bed and again went to sleep.

II



ON THE Tuesday morning the cricket match started, the young Apollo attitudinized full in the lime-light—a very perfect figure of sleek muscle and pantherine sinew in his silk cricketing shirt thrown wide open at the neck. Half the women around the lawns were in love with him.

Winning the toss, he put himself in to bat first wicket down; knock up a hundred in brilliant gallery style; and declared the innings closed as soon as he had made his century, regardless of the wishes of the tail-end men who would have liked their knock as well.

The cricket match was arranged for the mornings only of Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday; in the afternoons it was racing that took the house-party's attention.

Evening found the hero in the midst of an admiring buzz of women; but late, when most of the feminine half of the house-party had retired, Hallard contrived to get a game of baccarat started. He had a plan in mind of an entirely different nature to the scheme of the night before. The cricketer had won a hundred pounds or so at the races that afternoon, and Hallard wanted him at a baccarat table.

He wanted Lambert to win. *He was going to help him win!* Even if it had to be partly at his own expense, he was going to carry out that quixotic plan. The Gold Cup was completely out of his thoughts; all his energies were bent on his self-imposed task of rescue for Nita Dennison without her knowing it.

Consequently he went up to Lambert in friendly fashion and began chaffing him about his luck.

"To hit up a century in the mornin', spot a couple of ten-to-one winners in the afternoon, and then have all the women at your feet in the evenin'—it's too deuced lucky to last," drawled Hallard. "Don't you get pulled into this baccarat. Come along to the billiard-room and play me a couple of hundred up."

"What for?" asked Lambert.

"A sov. on the game, if you like."

"Thanks; I don't play for marbles. I like a sporting interest in my game," retorted Lambert with carefully studied insolence.

"For that matter, so do I. But I don't mind bettin' you won't make anything much over baccarat to-night. A man's luck is like a motor-tire: run it too long and it goes bust with a bang."

"What's your bet?"

"Six to one in fivers you don't clear five hundred over the cards."

"Done!"

"Mind you, I'm free to plank against you, at the bank or puntin'," cautioned Hallard.

Claude Lambert looked him over superciliously and nodded a careless assent. He had no great estimate of the intellect or judgment of this dilettante idler.



NOW baccarat is by no means the game of pure chance it looks to the outsider at first impression. Two cards are dealt to the right-hand *tableau*, two cards to the left-hand *tableau*, and two to the banker. Whichever hand totals in pips nearest to nine wins (the court cards counting as zero). But each *tableau* can call, if desired, for an extra card, and then the banker has choice of call. On the judgment of that call, on the reading of men's faces and gestures, fortunes have been made—and lost.

Presently Hallard bought a bank at one of the tables, and Lambert seated himself to punt against him, together with a dozen other men. Under his pose of dilettante carelessness John Hallard was in reality playing with all the tense concentration of wit to which he had trained himself. Gold and notes were pouring in upon him from the dozen punters at the table.

Lambert, looking thunderous, was dou-

bling and redoubling stakes against the bank, and then the moment arrived for which John Hallard had been so carefully waiting.

"Haven't I nearly wiped you out, old man?" he drawled in Lambert's direction with a smile that challenged to action. "You know I warned you to keep away from the cards."

With the whole table smiling in sympathy with the challenge, the cricketer-hero was stung to decisive action.

"Complement!" he called out loudly.

That meant that he staked on one deal of the cards an amount equal to the pile now lying by the banker.

Hallard was perfectly certain that his opponent had not that sum in his possession in cash, but he said nothing. The whole table watched in silence while the banker dealt out two cards to Lambert and two to himself.

For a full ten seconds Lambert hesitated whether to call or not for the extra card. Hallard judged that he must hold a 5 or a 6. Himself he held a "natural" 9—unbeatable.

"I stand on this," called the punter.

Hallard had only to stand pat also, and the hand was won. Instead, he deliberately drew a third card, spoiling his hand completely.

"Mine's a 5," cried Lambert, showing his cards.

Hallard threw his own hand into the discard, and smilingly pushed over to the punter a pile of notes and gold totaling to close on three hundred pounds. The whole table murmured sympathy.

But Hallard said gaily, in the set form of the baccarat table:

"*Messieurs, il y a une suite*," and rose to give up the banker's place to some one else.

"Bluffed you into taking the third card!" sneered the cricketer, counting up his winnings greedily.

"You're too hot stuff, old man," was the smiling reply.

Lambert bought the next bank, had a big run of luck, and rose from the table finally a winner of close on eight hundred pounds. To that he added a twenty-five from Hallard in settlement of their bet.

"Now he'll surely be able to redeem the pendant," thought John Hallard, well pleased with his night's work.

III



WEDNESDAY morning saw the hero again in full limelight. He put himself on bowl at the best end, with the sun behind him, and made a killing among the batsmen of the other team.

As the morning wore on, Hallard kept a close but unobtrusive watch on Nita Denison. He found her white-faced at breakfast-time, but by one o'clock there were drawn lines of anxiety about her eyes and mouth, and her hands were twitching as though beyond her control.

The situation lay so plain that spoken words could not have made it plainer. The cur had not passed word to her that he now had the money to redeem the pendant.

In brief, he intended to stick to his money. Or perhaps to pay off other debts with it.

It was then that John Hallard realized that here was a case for the big stick—for prompt, ruthless, smashing action. He left the cricket-ground, made his way to Lambert's bedroom, careless of being observed, and forced open a locked valise. In it he found a cash-box; in the cash-box the receipt for the pledged pendant and nearly eleven hundred pounds in cash.

He took the receipt and exactly one thousand pounds, and borrowed a car of Lord Craythorpe's for the ride to London.

In a discreet little back room of an opulent jeweler's in Regent Street the document and the money were exchanged for the black pearl pendant. To the jeweler it was a matter of complete indifference who ever took away the jewel, provided that the legal receipt were returned to absolve him of all responsibility.

The matter so far had progressed with uncanny smoothness. By four o'clock Hallard had cleared the outermost suburbs of London and was joyfully opening up the throttle of the borrowed car on the straight level stretch of country road between Brontford and Staines. The car purred under the touch of the levers like a giant cat and sprang forward as though released from a cage. Within half an hour the car should be back at "Wellwood"—

Out from behind a hedge sprang a policeman with uplifted palm.

For a moment Hallard was tempted to drive on, regardless. But sober judgment prevailed. He jammed on the brakes and pulled up.

"Thirty-four miles an hour, sir," said the constable, holding out a fat watch as evidence.

"That's all right, inspector. I won't dispute your word. Here's my card. Let me know what the damage is, and I'll pay it straight away."

"Can't do that, sir. Case must go before the bench in the usual way."

"Very well. Write me what I've got to pay."

"Certainly, sir. Now will you please let me have a look at your license, as a matter of form."

Hallard had no license. He silently cursed himself for not having brought a licensed chauffeur with him to drive the car. Tentatively he took out a sovereign from his pocket and balanced it in his hand.

But the constable was not to be bribed. No doubt he had his eye on the promotion ladder. He frowned at the gold coin, and asked again for the license to be shown him.

"Frankly, I haven't it with me," said Hallard. "In too much of a hurry when I left home."

"Then you can't drive this car any farther."

"But it's a matter of life and death for a woman!"

"It's a matter of the King's regulations," retorted the constable with dignity.



WHAT with a forced visit to the police station and the finding of a chauffeur, it was well after six o'clock before John Hallard drove in at the gates of "Wellwood" and round to the garage.

As he alighted from the car, Claude Lambert came rapidly forward.

"Kenrick, I want a word with you!" he snapped.

"With pleasure, old man," drawled Hallard. "What's up?"

"You'll soon hear what's up. For your own sake we won't discuss it in front of the servants. Come along with me."

There was an empty stable near at hand. The cricketer caught hold of John Hallard's arm and drew him inside. Then he shut the door, clicked a key in the lock, pocketed the key, and snarled:

"When I went to my cash-box to get out some money for paying a racing debt, I found a thousand pounds missing. One of the maids told me, when I asked her, that

she had seen you going into my room just before lunch. Is that so or not?"

"Of course it's so," drawled Hallard coolly.

"What for?"

"For the thousand pounds. What else?"

"You infernal thief!"

"Not at all, old man. I was merely carryin' out for you a little promise that had slipped your memory."

"What d'you mean?"

"This." Hallard drew out a small brown-paper-covered packet from his pocket, and read out an address written on it in ink:

Mrs. Dennison, "Wellwood," Ascot. By Hand.

"Give it to me!" ordered Lambert in the tone he would use to a groom.

At that the "Sir Ralph Kenrick" manner dropped from off Hallard like a discarded garment, and the steel of his will snapped into his voice:

"Give it to you? No, not now! I gave it to you last night, thinking you had some spark of decent feeling in you. I don't give it again!"

"Last night!"

"At the baccarat table. That time you played 'complement,' I had a natural against your six. I drew a third card so as to let you win close on three hundred pounds. I helped you after that to win at least another two hundred. I put the money into your hands so that you could keep your promise to Mrs. Dennison. To-day I got your measure down to the fraction of a millimeter, and I decided to keep your promise for you. Here's the black pearl pendant. I intend to give it Mrs. Dennison myself, so as to cut out any further reliance on your memory!"

"I'll have you arrested for theft!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"You'll not leave this stable until the matter is settled between you and me as man to man. Here's the pendant"—Hallard placed his package in a manger behind him—"and now we'll fight for it."

"I'll not fight. I've got to keep my hands right for the match to-morrow," growled Lambert sullenly.

"You're a cricketer—no one doubts that. Now try and be a sportsman as well—if it's in you, which I doubt. Fight for the pendant!"

"I'll not fight, I tell you!"

"Then if *you* won't, *I* will!" said John Hallard, and drove his fist full on to the other's chest.



LAMBERT picked himself up from the floor with an oath and threw off his coat and waistcoat, collar and tie. Hallard followed suit.

To outward appearance the odds lay all with the cricketer, tall and splendidly modeled and with his shoulder, arm, chest and flank muscles kept in thorough order by his almost daily work on the cricket-field. Hallard was slack in muscle with the life of ease he had to keep to in the character of "Sir Ralph Kenrick."

But muscle alone does not win a fight. The nerve and will behind the muscle count big.

Lambert led off warily. The sudden change of his opponent from the character of a dilettante to the character of a man of purpose had struck fear into him. He aimed to get the other's measure as a boxer.

But Hallard had no intention of having this merely a sparring match. He knew that he would be winded long before the athlete. He had to hit hard and hit soon.

Without regard for defense, he rained attack on the tall, muscular frame of the cricketer.

Claude Lambert covered and dodged and feinted. In a far corner of the stable his eye had caught a runnel slippery with water, and cunningly he drew his adversary toward the treacherous foothold.

A too vigorous punch on the part of John Hallard caught by an arm guard, a side jab in return, and Hallard had slipped on the moisture of the runnel and fallen heavily.

As he lay on the ground stunned for the moment, the cricketer with a snarl of triumph lifted his boot and kicked him full in the ribs.

Hallard gasped and twisted in agony.

"So now you've got what you were asking for!" sneered Lambert.

He turned on his heel and went to get possession of the pendant.

But he reckoned without the nerve and will behind the muscle. Hallard watched him, while trying to get back breath and strength—watched him take up the brown-paper-covered packet—watched him to the door of the stable—watched him put the key into the lock and turn it.

And at that last moment, the nerve and will came into action like the reserves of an army repulsed at the first attack. He sprang up, cleared the width of the stable in a streak of time, and smashed on to Lambert a blow from the shoulder that sent him staggering to the floor.

As the cricketer came up from his knees and his hands left the ground, a second punch full in the face smashed him down again!

Four times he went down before he lay still. The muscular frame of the athlete shivered in the stillness as though he were in an ague.

The shivering was not from cold. His nerve was gone. He began to whimper curses.

Panting to regain his breath, John Hallard watched him for a full minute. Then he asked quietly:

"Who takes the pendant?"

"Take it, blast you!" muttered the cricketer-hero, dabbing with the sleeve of his shirt at his mouth, where two front teeth were hanging loose.

"I suppose Nita egged you on to this, the little——!"

Hallard slammed the stable door on that coward's epithet.

V

 AT THE foot of the broad, oaken staircase that leads down to the hall of "Wellwood," Nita Dennison was waiting among the others for the sounding of the dinner-gong.

There were lines of tense pain in her face, while she strove to chat brightly about the doings of the day.

A heavy footstep sounded on the staircase above, and the stout, fussy, coarse-jowled figure of her husband came into sight. He descended slowly, his eye fixed coldly on his wife—on her neck where the black pearl pendant ought to be hanging.

Mr. Dennison came down and made his way toward her with a set question on his lips.

But before he could draw her aside, a

young fellow with one eye almost closed up intervened.

"This is for you, Mrs. Dennison, isn't it?" drawled the voice of Sir Ralph Kenrick. He held a brown-paper-covered packet in his hand. "Beastly careless of the servants to leave it lyin' about. Found it out by the lawns. 'Scuse me—got to buck up and change."

He went off to the upper corridors without waiting for thanks. Up-stairs he found Renie waiting in his room, and she naturally wanted to know the meaning of the swollen and discolored eye. He explained in full as he changed into his evening clothes.

"So now our debt to Nita Dennison is canceled," he concluded cheerfully.

Renie did not take the story in quite the spirit he expected. In fact, she took it decidedly coldly.

"And you've wasted three days, lost a couple of hundred pounds, and lost the chance of the Gold Cup for—for practically nothing," was her chilly comment.

Hallard was astounded at this attitude on the part of Renie. It did not strike him at the moment that it arose from a very natural jealousy and not from cold-heartedness.

But the dinner-gong rang and further discussion had to be postponed.

Late that night Renie took up the matter again. "I've had a private chat with Nita," said she. "I wanted her to know exactly what the episode cost you in cash and brains. I wanted her to realize her obligation. You forget her husband's on the board of several big Westralian companies."

"Hold on a moment. That one gets past me. What's the connection?"

"Of course I asked her for some inside tips when next there's anything going to happen in Westralian mines," answered Renie calmly. "We can't expect to live merely on thanks from damsels in distress."

Hallard nodded assent.

"You're right! Shake me and wake me up. I certainly ought to work Dennison for a good healthy touch. Let's dig out a scheme!"



The Luck that Came to Donovan

by
Frank H. Walker



THE way of it was this: On the brilliant night offered to your inspection, "Big Mike" Donovan, city detective, was standing on the moon-flooded porch of the cozy home of Mrs. Dunwoddie, widow. All evening he and the lady had been making the rounds of the neighborhood's nickel-shows. Now Donovan was stalling off the necessary good night.

The tall widow was leaning against the door-frame, her arms folded, her blue eyes absent-looking, and Donovan, watching admiringly the effulgence of the moon on her auburn hair and on the one fascinating freckle on the tip of her dainty nose, was wondering—

But now you have guessed it! Although this was only the second time Donovan had been in the widow's company, there were hot words clamoring in his heart.

But, wisely, Donovan wasn't saying things—not on such short acquaintance. He only bit the ends of his close-cropped mustache, remarking suddenly:

"Sure, Mrs. Dunwoddie, yez seem worried this gorgeous evening. I hope 'tis not because of all the burglaries going on in the neighborhood."

The widow smiled vaguely. "No, Mr. Donovan," she returned softly, "'tis of my brother I've been thinking. He's coming into town to-night, or in the morning, and he—" Abruptly the widow paused. Was it tears that made her eyes gleam, or just the moonlight? "It sure does be a fine evening out, Mr. Donovan," she said, half sighing.

Donovan looked at her narrowly a moment; then he fumbled for his watch.

"Sure, it is getting late, too," he ventured, somehow a bit uncomfortable. "Why, 'tis one o'clock!" And saying good-night, Donovan started slowly for home. Slowly, for he was puzzled.

Why had she paused at mention of her brother? Why had she been seemingly worrying about him? Who was he?

Finally Donovan gave it up. He fell to thinking of other things—of the prettiest auburn hair, of the brightest blue eyes, of the most kissable mouth in the world—and, as he plowed on, all about him bright as day, there suddenly drifted in on his blissful thoughts the shriek of an engine's whistle, followed by the rumbling of a train out of the Sixty-seventh Street station, half a mile ahead, then—all the dead night silence again!

Donovan swung along past light-flooded flat-buildings, stores, prairies, his eyes still absent. He was abreast the street on which he lived, two blocks west of the railroad elevation, when abruptly he stopped and listened.

Yes, there it came again—the soft *pat-pat* of catlike, stealthy feet. Surely, it was not one of the ordinary late-comers. Perhaps—

Suspicious, Donovan stepped out of the moon's effulgence into the shadows of a flat-building, and, just as the soft steps came up to him, leaped out.

There was a startled imprecation. The soft-soled one leaped aside. But Donovan pulled his gun. And the other—a tall, red-

haired fellow—stood, splotted with the light coming down in a golden stream, glaring wildly at Donovan.

But Donovan's eyes were on the bundle the tall fellow clutched under his left arm. Then he looked down at the valise in the other's right hand.

"What you got in the bundle?" he snorted.

The fellow shrank back. His arm shook. Out to Donovan's ears came the clink of mettle. With a sudden movement he tore a gaping hole in the parcel, and, aided by the moon, took a quick squint.

His grasp tightened on the other's arm. "What you doing with the tools?"

The red-haired fellow's lips parted in a ghastly grin. "I guess you know," he said, with a nervous laugh. "I see the game's up. I'll go easy."

But Donovan was strangely silent. His eyes were fixed, strangely intent, on a freckle—one lonely freckle!—on the tip of the red-head's long nose. Finally he glared again at the bundle.

So this was the reason she had halted! Donovan's grasp loosened. "It's all right, my lad," he said huskily. "I didn't recognize—you—at first."

The tall one blinked stupidly. Donovan bristled.

"Beat it!" he snarled. "I see now why she stopped telling me about you. You're a — crook. No wonder she's worried. You've come back to live on her for a while, eh? Huh, I ought to drag you in—you and your safe-cracking tools! I ought— Beat it! Get out of me sight!"

There was a rattle of metal. Farther and farther it sounded down the street. Suddenly it ceased.

And Donovan, pondering truculently over the strange way wickedness pursues even the good and beautiful, turned on up toward home and bed.



AT SEVEN o'clock the next morning, Donovan was awakened by a call on the 'phone from his superior—the lieutenant. He was wanted on important business at once. Obediently Donovan hurried to the station-house.

The lieutenant looked up with a frown when Donovan advanced to his desk. "Mike," he said, fingering a paper headed "Department of Police" on the desk before him, "Headquarters called up a bit

ago. Seems Denver had a bank-robbery night before last. Twenty thousand copped. Vault blown all to —. 'Red Dick' alias 'Red, the Blow,' Cronin—he pulled off a big job in New York six years ago—before your time—well, he's the suspect for this job. He's been in Denver; now he's disappeared. See the connection?"

Donovan moistened his lips. "Yes, sir."

The lieutenant grunted. "Well, they think he's back up here; that he's eluded their drag-net, somehow. We've got orders to watch out for him. I had Morgan over at the Sixty-seventh Street station of the I. L., only direct line in from Denver, and—"

"Well, the station-agent said a red-headed fellow, with a suit-case, got off there this morning—got off the 1.10. It's up to you, Donovan. Here's Cronin's record and description, and here's twenty for expenses. Nail him."

Donovan took the paper and small roll the lieutenant handed him and started for the door.

"Er—Mike."

Donovan, his face strangely pale now, came back.

"Just wanted to tell you there's a thousand reward out," he explained. "Do your best. We need the rep here."

Donovan's jaw set. "Yes, sir," he repeated, saluting, and passed wearily out.

Once on the pavement, he ripped open the paper the lieutenant had given him, skimming over Cronin's record to his description:

"Tall; somewhat nervous; has red hair; blue eyes; is smooth-shaven; has a long, straight nose, with a freckle directly on the end of it."

"A . . . freckle! . . . Red hair! . . . Tall!"

Donovan's teeth worried his mustache ferociously. Wheeling, he started down the street at a rapid stride.



AT THE door of the widow's cozy cottage, Donovan rang the bell. The widow, clad in white, answered it.

"Sure, yez be early with your calls, Mr. Donovan," she chided, smiling. She stood aside, and Donovan strode into the little parlor.

He smiled vaguely. "Your—your brother, Mrs. Dunwoddie! Did he come?"

The widow stared. "My brother!" Then she smiled again. "Oh, you came to see him, Mr. Donovan? Sure, he came—this morning—at six o'clock. He's upstairs. He's been to Arizona for his health. He—he has consumption, Mr. Donovan. I tried to—to tell you last night, but even thinking——"

Turning, she led the way to a bedroom upstairs. Here, asleep, in a chair by the window, sat a short, dark, hollow-cheeked man.

Donovan's jaw clamped. "So—*that's* your brother!"

The widow frowned. "Why, I said so, Mr. Donovan. Sure, is it the morning air? Yez don't seem yourself, at all."

Softly she closed the door to the room. "You come up to-night, Mr. Donovan, and see him," she said. "I guess he's pretty tired. He was awake a minute ago."

Donovan said he would. He went out—as in a dream. On the pavement he blinked stupidly, and dazedly passed his hand over his aching forehead. Then, rousing, he walked a few blocks northward and boarded a west-bound car.



AT THE first street-car crossing, the outer border of one of the toughest districts in the city, Donovan alighted. For a second he stood gazing thoughtfully down at the long row of saloons lining the west side of the street and the tangle of cheap tenements hanging over the walks of the other.

Then slowly, in search of a possible "stool," he passed on southward, visiting each gaudy saloon in turn, talking with gamblers, "dope fiends," bartenders, and others, who eked out a miserable existence under the watchful eyes of the law.

His search seemed in vain, however, until, in the middle of the block, he halted before a dive more pretentious than the others, and, striding in, ordered a glass of beer, exchanging a sly wink with the bartender.

A few early morning customers were in the place. From the back room came the rattle of chips. A game was going on—most likely had been all night. Well, didn't "Long Ed" pay for the privilege by secretly furnishing information of events in the district?

The bartender was busy, but finally he came up, removed Donovan's half empty

glass and set down another. Under this, Donovan found what he had been eagerly hoping for—a folded slip of paper.

Outside, he glanced at it:

"Dip Willie's got a roommate at the Delaware. Blew in during the early morning hours."

Donovan's eyes livened. Here, at any rate, was a chance. He knew "Dip Willie's" room in the rickety building huddling among the tenements across the car-tracks, over whose entrance a dim light still burned in the battered sign "Hotel." A former lodging-house, it was now the home of strange transients, among whom Willie, for services slyly rendered, was one of the few who "stood in right."

Donovan crossed and turned in under the battered sign, entering a dark hallway and passing carefully up the creaking stairway. Standing on the landing that looked down the long, shabby corridor, he halted to regain his breath.

Directly to his left was Willie's room. Donovan listened a second, then put his shoulder to the flimsy door. It gave. Donovan, revolver drawn, crashed into the disordered room.

And as he fell, from the bed in the corner a red-headed figure sprang half out. An oath broke from its twisted lips. One of its hands jerked a revolver from under the pillows. A shot whizzed into the wall above the crouching Donovan's head. Then——

Donovan sprang. His huge paw landed on the big freckle on the other's nose. The gun clattered to the floor. The creature crumpled on the bed.

Donovan watched him suspiciously an instant, then, with a snort, looked for Willie. He found him, cringing in fright beneath the bed.

Donovan let him stay there. Going to the window, he blew two sharp blasts on his whistle. Then he waited.

But not for long. From outside in the street came the shuffling, murmuring sounds a crowd gathering make. From the interior of the "hotel" came cries, the rush of feet. A man in uniform entered the room.

"So 'tis you, Donovan?" he exclaimed, grinning.

"'Tis me," returned Donovan, with dignity. "Call the wagon, Paddy."

Paddy vanished. While he was gone, Donovan scurried about, discovering the

familiar valise and bundle under a pile of clothes. The valise he opened; then closed it, with a gasp. His hand did not leave it again until he and the red-headed one and Willie alighted from the wagon at the station-house.

Here the quiet one on the stretcher was taken into the squad-room to be revived. Donovan, still clutching the valise, sat at the lieutenant's desk and gave him his story of the capture.

The lieutenant patted Donovan on the shoulder. "You're there, Donovan," he congratulated. "And you've made a thousand cool this morning. 'Twas good work, all right, all right."

He turned to the telephone, called a number, then:

"Hello! . . . The Chief? . . . This is O'Brien, out at Woodland Park . . . Yes . . . We've got 'Red Dick' Cronin, Chief . . . Yes . . . Detective Dono-

van got him. . . . Great head-work. . . . You want him? . . . I'll send the whole outfit down to you? . . . All right . . . What! . . . Been raised? . . . Two thousand? . . . All right. . . . Good-by."

The lieutenant jammed the receiver on to its hook. "This is a big pinch, Mike," he exploded, seriously. "The old man said so. And he wants you and Red and the money down to his office. And—well, the reward's been raised, too. It's two thousand now. Er—you're a lucky man, Mike, do you know it?"

Donovan chuckled. He rose, still clutching the valise. "Believe I am, lieutenant," he grinned, saluting.

"But sure," he said to himself, as he headed for the squad-room, anxious to start for Headquarters, "'twas a good thing I knew enough not to pinch that red-head last night. 'Twas—'twas a delay worth a thousand, by heck!"

A Legitimate Double-Cross

by
J.M. Allen



I'M GOIN' down to headquarters in about an hour and buy Speakeasy out of jail. He got pinched, night before last, for premeditatedly hittin' a brother negro on the jaw. No, 'twasn't no mill to speak of—just *biff, biff*, and six foot of Pullman porter was spread out on the pavement while Speakeasy leaned against the depot and waited for the bull to come and pinch him. 'Twasn't premeditated neither—it was an inspiration. We—that means The Guy from Texas, Speakeasy and me—was just gettin' back from Corona with enough of Webfoot's specie to choke a stockyard.

'Course the loveliest part of it belonged

to Texas, but there was a skin off it comin' to me, and also Speakeasy has a bit of change to his account; and this, together with the satisfaction of having put over a double-cross on Webfoot, got into his noodle so strong he saw where he was just naturally compelled to celebrate and turn on the heat. But also he had a hunch, knowin' where former winnin's evaporated, that all he's goin' to turn on is a week of gin and trimmin's, after which he will come back to his senses, sick and broke.

So he explains to me that, if he could be beyond temptation till the newness is off his joy, he'd save his dough. Well, we was just gettin' off the train then, and as we

come through the depot the inspiration got in its work.

"Mr. Texas," says he, "just issue my share o' the trash to Mr. Grant. He'll mind it for me. I know what to do now; I'll get run in."

And he left without another word. We got outside just in time to see him step quietly up to his game and put it on him.

Double-cross Web? Surest thing you know, and 'twas a cinch from the bell-tap. I love Mr. Webfoot Oliver right next to snakes and lizards, not only because he tried to hand me a frame-up when I knocked out Kid Sand in his club in Corona, but also because he's a yellow sport, a rotten guy in general and just about as right as your left foot. Speakeasy and me sure fraternizes whenever it comes time to slip Web somethin' painful.

It was through Speakeasy that I got into this game. Speakeasy, you remember, fought quite a string of scraps for Web, till Web ordered him to lay down. But he'd got in the habit of winnin' and couldn't lose on such a C. Q. D. Consequently Web dropped a hundred or two and Speakeasy was in bad. Then he seconded me the night I made the Kid quit the game, and after that Web made Jasper County dirt burn his feet. So he's been hangin' round here since, and that's how he happened to run across Texas.

Speakeasy was fightin' in and around Corona the time Web trimmed Texas; so they recognized and soon got together in the pleasant pastime of cussin' Web. Then Texas puts him jerry to what he's about to pull off—which is peaches to Speakeasy. Then he shows the darkey where a willin' dinge can get on and busy, and Speakeasy hikes for a pawn-shop, raises what trash he can, hands it to Texas, and, after givin' him my address, catches a train to Corona.

Then Texas looks me up. He's a big husky guy, thick at the belt and has plentiful whiskers. Also, when I look at the set of his eye and the width of his jaw, I dope him out to be a finish fighter and millin' till he's put out. So we are pals in a minute.

As he passes it to me, he'd come up out of Texas two years before and cashed in a train-load of beef at the packin' houses. After he has sent about half the proceeds to his partner in Texas, he still has some five thousand to the good, and decides to ride around a bit and accumulate some ex-

citement. But just about the time he gets to goin' good, he falls in with a guy whose name he learns afterward is Bud Willitt—though that ain't the name he's usin' at the time. This Willitt is sure the smooth article—tall, slender, yellow-haired and blue-eyed; also the champ con-heaver of the world.



AFTER one day's acquaintance, he tells Texas that he's a sprinter, and that's why he don't care what he do with money; that the tall grass is full of comeons who can do a hundred yards in the neighborhood of eleven seconds, and that the dear yokels have socks and socks full of *e pluribus* money to bet that that is runnin'; that he is leisurely wendin' his way at this particular time toward Jasper County where there is some stagnant coin already stacked; and that in four days he figgers to stop off in Jasper County, step off a hundred yards, pull down five hundred greasy bones and catch the next train out; that the main worry with him is that he can't raise over five hundred to put up, because there's a gink backin' the Corona sprinter that wants to talk in thousands.

Then he takes Texas out in the suburbs, measures off a hundred yards and steps it, in his street shoes, in ten and a quarter. Texas bit prompt. He would talk thousands to this Corona guy and after that to any other boob that had a sprinter he thought well of.

The fourth day they hit Corona. Web was on the job with his sprinter and pals and not talkin' a thing but money; so Texas got out what was in his pockets, what was in the belt next his hide and what was under the porous plaster under the belt, after which he feels quite serene because he figgers that his income for the next five minutes is due to average eight hundred a minute.

He didn't get time to be anxious, because, all the dough bein' up, there was nothin' to delay the finish. Web borrowed Texas's gun to start them with and emptied the first four chambers to be sure it wouldn't miss fire. Then the men toed the scratch.

"Ready?" "Ready." One—two—*bang!* and away they flashed, Texas's man gainin' a yard in the first twenty.

And then, just as Texas was thinkin' what a crime it was to skin the lowly simps this way, his man stubbed his toe or some-

thin' and the next second pitched forward head first on the ground and rolled over. Then Web's man took the money in a trot while Texas ate his cigar. His own man seemed pretty well dazed and was bleedin' at the mouth and nose when they picked him up, but Webfoot, good old Samaritan Webfoot, begged to be allowed to take care of the poor unfortunate man till he was right again; and, as Texas was peeled down to mighty little over car-fare home, Web's prayer gets action.

So Texas beat it home, and when he sprung his hard-luck story they gave him the merry smile and wised him of the fact that his sprinter made his livin' fallin' down in races.

Then he had a set-to with Cuban smallpox, and while he was comin' back the idea of gettin' even was framed up. So he let his whiskers keep on growin' and they with the pockmarks, the rearranged phiz, and what extra flesh he put on after the sickness got through with him, made a pretty fair disguise. Also he got some more money.

And now he had found out the fakers were still fishin' at the same old hole, and he had already talked to Bud. His frame-up was to play their game, just as before; only this time he was going to make Bud stay on his feet. At this point he showed me a thirty-eight caliber gun which was to be loaned to Web to start the race. Then he hauled out a forty-four which was to convince Bud that for once in his life he'd better win. He wanted me to go along to see him through. I was to bet some of his money as a stall, so as to be right where things would bust loose, if it come to a "bustin' loose," and in general to have my mit in all that come off, rough work and all. When it was over, I had a hundred bucks comin' to me.

Did I sit in? Did I? Say, I took one long look at that guy's broad jaws and cool gray eyes, and then I searched a lonesome hundred-dollar bill out of my vest and slid it to him.

"Texas," sez I, "I'm on the job. There's my forfeit money and I want you to string it with yours in Corona and get it up at ringside odds. Also that same instruction goes for every dime I'm to get for secondin' you. So, see Bud, bring the thing to a head and let's get some action."

That very night I got word that every-

thing was set for the mornin' of the fourth day follerin'. I judge the pass-word in Texas's lodge is, "Do it now."



THE fourth mornin' Texas was waitin' for me at the depot in Corona with a hack. When I had climbed in, I asked about Speakeasy, not havin' had any dope whatever from the Senegambin.

"Oh, Speak's on duty all right, all right, and every sou he could raise is to be strung along with yours. He'll be at the track. We've got an hour yet, so let's liquor. Then we're to drive by and take Bud out with us. Here's five hundred you're to bet. Hey, driver, pull up at that plate-glass corner!"

The thing was to be pulled off quietly in the race-track at the fair-grounds and Web and his gang—four hack-loads—were waitin' for us when we pulled up. Also Speakeasy with a pair of classy lookin' horses hitched to a double-seated buggy. Web had already measured off the hundred yards and stretched the tape, so Bud, in sweater and breeches, went on the track to warm up while we settled the preliminaries. Web, figurin' us gilded come-ons, come at us with a hand-satchel full of kale.

"Say, Mr. Man," says he, "the thousand you've got up is well enough for stake money, but how am I to subdue this here bunch of specie, when every nickel of it is screamin' for action?"

Then he recognized me.

"Why, hello, Old Fox. What the — are you doin' here?" He looked suspicious.

"Texas, here," I explained, "is an old college chum o' mine from 'Frisco. He told me he had a good thing on for this mornin', so I run down to look it over and, maybe, invest."

"Then this is the investment window. How much'll you have? Don't be a hog, Foxy."

"Wait till I look at your man," says I, and left him bullyin' Texas.

I guess Texas was feelin' him out cautious, because it was five minutes before they called Cropley the stakeholder. I looked around just in time to see a half a peck of money laid in Cropley's lunch-hooks, so I rushed over and got my five hundred matched and tucked in too. There bein' no more dough to cover, Web then ordered the runners to get right and toe

the scratch. They came to the line and waited.

I got my place against the railin' with my elbows touchin' Cropley's—as was understood between Texas and me—and I don't mind ownin' up that I was a trifle nervous. I can get in the ring and face the mob's favorite, no matter how fast he is, or how rough he plays, or what his gang yells don't upset me much. But two lone men—and a darky—tryin' to double-cross a frame-up, in the midst of four hack-loads of trouble, and with Webfoot himself on the job, ain't situated so they can afford to take a nap. But Texas, up near the scratch, looked as cool as a snowball; and Speakeasy, down near the finish, with a box under his arm, was eatin' an apple. So I bucked up.

The sprinters, stripped to jerseys and runnin' pants, were faced down the track at the scratch as if ready to be off, when Web called for a gun.

"Who's got a pistol? I must have left mine at the hotel. I can't find it anywhere and we must have one to start them with. Great Scott, hasn't a man in the bunch got a gun?"

Of course, none of his gang answered, because it was only a stall to disarm the guy (if he's got a gun) who is about to be skinned. But Texas spoke up,

"Here's a gun;" and passed over the .38 caliber.

"Thanks," says Web. "Now wait a minute, you fellows, till I see if it is sure fire." He emptied four chambers. "All right; you runners toe the mark."

"Wait just one minute, Web," interrupted Texas, "just a word to my man."

He walked down outside the fence a little ways from the gang and motioned to Bud, who came scowlin' down the inside. Course I didn't know exactly what was said till afterward, but I could see that every word sunk in on Bud. What Texas said, as he told me afterward, was:

"Bud, run the whole distance to-day. Don't fall down till you've won this race or the probability is you'll never get up; for when you go down, I mean to empty this Colt into your carcass if I stretch for it! I'm Renfro of Texas and you'll remember that on this very track you turned me two years ago for four thousand. So you may judge if after I come back and put up my money in the same old way, I am four-

flushin'. Now, go back to the scratch and don't so much as look at Web. My eye is on every motion you make and if anything goes wrong, I'll kill you like a dog before your gang can interfere! My carriage is down there at the finish. Burst the tape—hop in. The driver is paid to take you wherever you want to go and in a hurry. Now go and *run!*"

Bud's eyes never left the ground till he was on the scratch and crouched for the start. Web's words come sharp as a knife:

"Ready? One—two—*bang!*"

And say, some runnin' certainly was turned on. Bud had wings, and when he tore through the tape the other guy was three yards behind. The driver had the door open when he cleared the fence, and before the gang got it well into their nuts what had been put over, the carriage was flyin' out of the big gate on two wheels.

Texas turned to Web.

"Looks like I win Web—what?"

And Web says:

"Looks that way to me, too."

He looked dazed and his lips moved together like a trap. Texas moved over to the other side of the stakeholder, so we had him between us.

"Dump, son," says Texas.

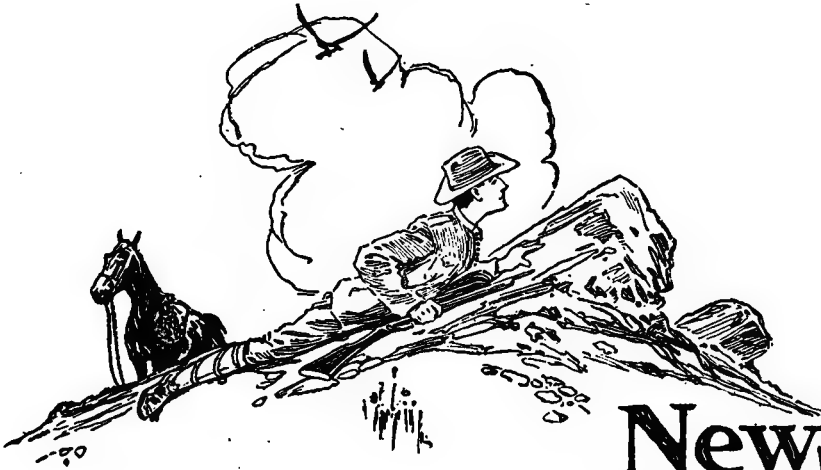
So Cropley looked at me and saw business, looked at Texas and saw business and—dumped. Then we climbed into the back seat of Speakeasy's rig and hit the road for Shadd's Crossin', eight miles away.

When Corona was a mile back, we quit lookin' behind us and unclenched our teeth.

"Speakeasy," says Texas, "what is in that box?"

Speakeasy pulled up on a bridge over a creek before he answered.

"There's snakes in that box—three of 'em, an' rattlers at that," says he, calm and unsmilin'. "Look. I had a darky ketch 'em for me—three bones he charged for 'em. You see, if Bud had fell down, you might a-shot him, but that wouldn't a-kept the other guy from winnin' the money—an' some o' my dimes was 'sociatin' wid your dollars in that pot. So I figgered that while you was pluggin' Bud, I'd empty this box in the path ahead of the other guy, an' then all bets would a-been off. Glad I didn't have to use 'em." He heaved the box into the creek. "It sure was eleven excitin' seconds. Git up!"



News of De Wet

by William Patterson White

WYNKOOPSKRAAL is a very little town not far from the Vaal, and the war-wave had swept over it more than once. First, Grimwood drove Handelaar's commando through the streets of Wynkoopskraal. Then came Delarey, and he chased Grimwood and his men thirty miles. Methuen ousted Delarey, and later De Wet whipped Methuen thoroughly and caused him to fall back on Boshof. But Methuen, reinforced by the Tenth Mounted Infantry and Smith-Westery's two brigades, came back. De Wet departed northward and took up a position among the *kopjes* not far from Slingman's Nek. This was promptly reported by Methuen's scouts.

Methuen rested a day at Wynkoopskraal. That afternoon Lieutenant Morgan, of the 10th M. I., decided to take a constitutional on the road to Slingman's Nek. A mile out of town he came suddenly upon a bearded individual riding a suspiciously fresh horse, and the saddle and wallets bore the marks of the Fourteenth Hussars. The man's uniform was her Majesty's.

Morgan dragged out his revolver and held the man up. The fellow explained, with a strong Boer accent, that he was one of Driscoll's Scouts and carried news of De Wet. He asked very civilly to be directed to Methuen. Now Driscoll's Scouts were

more Dutch than English, for all they drew Queen's rations and wore the British khaki. Morgan knew this, but the fresh horse and the Hussar equipment made him doubtful. It might be all right, still—

"That saddle and those wallets were never issued to you."

"That is right," replied the man, without even a flicker of his eyes. "Twelve of us were attached to the Fourteenth Hussars. I lost my horse and saddle at the Bothaville fight, so I took the saddle of a dead Hussar."

"Your horse is fresh."

"He should be. I took him from a *verdomde* burgher I met this afternoon."

The man was so frank about horse-stealing that Morgan smiled. He was not the Provost Marshal to take exception to a bit of commandeering.

"I imagine it's all right," said Morgan, shoving his revolver into its holster. "And you say De Wet has moved up to within ten miles of us?"

"Yes, he is now at Van Tuyle's Hoek. He should be attacked at once."

"You ride on. Any one will tell you where to find headquarters."

The man clucked to his horse, and Morgan resumed his stroll. That evening Wynkoopskraal buzzed with excitement. De Wet was to be attacked on the morrow.

Yes, the slim Christian had moved in. A scout sent by Driscoll himself had brought the news. There was no doubt about it. De Wet would be thrashed shortly. Morgan was well pleased. A strong love for quick action had been his main reason for entering the army.



NEXT morning Methuen marched out. Smith-Westerly's two brigades and the 10th M. I. were to attack the Boer front, while Methuen, with Grimwood's Horse, the First Australians, and five line regiments, fell upon the enemy's rear and right flank. It was good strategy and deserved to win.

Smith-Westerly marched two hours after Methuen left. The latter had a greater distance to go. Smith-Westerly was ordered not to attack until he heard Methuen's guns. Smith-Westerly felt hampered, for he was an energetic man and considered a brisk frontal attack supplemented by a flank movement the best thing in the world. He did not care for Methuen's other-way-about method at all. But he never thought of disobeying orders.

Smith-Westerly marched for five miles, then he halted his command on the top and reverse slope of a long ridge. Some very innocent-looking *kopjes* loomed up ahead, and he wished to know a little more about them before proceeding farther.

Lieutenant Morgan and ten men rode forward to investigate, which is always a thankless task. Their comrades of the 10th dismounted to examine saddle-girths. In the rear of the M. I. the two infantry brigades waited patiently. On either flank three batteries of the Royal Field Artillery unlimbered and watched the handful of M. I. Too often had the British troops marched up to innocent-looking *kopjes* and too often had burial trenches been crammed, while many of those left alive had gone to rusticate within the barb-wire enclosures of Waterval and Nooitgedacht. Her Majesty's forces were not doing this any more. They carefully "drew fire" first.

Slowly the scouts rode on. One mile—a mile and a half—then *Rap! Rap! Rap!* a dozen times. Another Boer pompom joined in, and then rippled and crashed the voices of the Mausers. The shells of the Vickers-Maxims skipped viciously among the mounted infantrymen, and steel-jacketed bullets whined past their ears. The M. I.

scouts wheeled about and raced back, Lieutenant Morgan in the rear. The scouts had not covered a hundred yards when a pompom shell struck a private's mount on the hip. The horse turned a somersault, and his rider spread-eagled through the air and landed on all fours. A Mauser bullet went through the back of another soldier, knocking him out of the saddle. The remaining scouts kept on—all but the lieutenant.

A bullet had clipped his mount on the neck, and the animal was in a frenzy. But Morgan was a strong man, and he forced the brute round and headed him for the man shot in the back. He reached him and dismounted. One look was sufficient. Under the left shoulder-blade was a small hole. In the man's chest was a great red rent. Already his eyes were glazing. Morgan dragged his capering horse to the other man.

This fellow was only dazed. Morgan helped him into the saddle and scrambled up behind him. He had barely touched the cantle when the horse screamed and staggered, one fore-leg dangling helplessly. A Mauser bullet had drilled its way through the knee joint. Morgan jumped off, helped the private down, and drew his revolver. He shoved it into the horse's ear and fired. Then Morgan picked up the still dazed soldier and strode on with him hurriedly.

Over his head whistled and screamed the shells of the British field artillery. The gunners were finding the range. On the long slope of the ridge, more than a mile away, Morgan saw Smith-Westerly's men coming into view. Little spurts of dust jumped up about Morgan's feet. A Boer fifteen-pound shell struck near by and blew up with a roar. A splinter went through his helmet and made his head swim.

The man in his arms twisted suddenly. Morgan looked down and saw a large hole in the fellow's forehead. He laid the private on the ground, turned, and ran. Now that there was no necessity for saving any life but his own he did not hesitate. He was a good nine hundred yards from the Boer position, but bullets streaked the air thicker than ever. One grazed his arm, and another went through his coat. Morgan began to speculate on his chances of being shot before he could get out of range. When a *kopje* a half-mile on his right suddenly crackled into life, he was sure he could never make it.



THAT particular *kopje* had not appeared to be occupied, and Morgan knew Smith-Westerly had not taken it into consideration at all. Even as he wished much evil on the Boers that occupied it, he thought how foolish it was of them to betray their position for the sake of shooting one man. Had they kept quiet they would have taken the British on the flank when the troops moved against the line of *kopjes* in front. Now—well, the British would take that *kopje* first.

But Morgan had no intention of being killed if he could avoid it. A *donga* yawned in front of his flying feet, and he slid headlong to the bottom before he had time to observe that ten Boers were there ahead of him.

"Hands up!" barked a young Boer, jerking a well-kept Mauser to his shoulder.

Morgan was not a fool. He put up his hands quickly, and a squat burgher with a dark, evil face disarmed him. Ensued a guttural conversation in Dutch among his captors. Morgan understood enough Dutch to gather that they were debating what to do with him—keep him there or take him before the *Generaal*. The matter was settled by the squat burgher.

"Come along, *rooinek*," said he.

Morgan followed the Boer along the *donga*. Trying to escape was useless. Two burghers walked behind Morgan, and he knew their Mausers were cocked. The four rounded a bend in the *donga*, and Morgan uttered a sharp exclamation. The *donga* fairly crawled with Boers!

"Gad!" said Morgan to himself. "If Smith-Westerly knew this!"

Morgan fully realized the value of the Boer position in the *donga*. Troops attacking the *kopjes* from which had come the first Boer fire would pass to one side of it, and those attacking the single *kopje* on the flank would pass on the other side. Thus the Boers in the *donga* could easily pour in an enfilading fire that would make short work of any attack. And Smith-Westerly would surely attack. The firing from the *kopjes* was merely a clever little ruse to draw the British on. Morgan groaned.

The squat Boer led Morgan into a group surrounding a burgher in boots and riding clothes. Morgan stared hard at the booted burgher. There was no mistaking those kindly eyes with the humor-wrinkles at the corners, nor that short beard. It was De Wet himself.

"Prisoner, *Generaal*," said the squat Boer respectfully.

The Boers always respected their generals, but they were a little afraid of De Wet. Even they could not tell what he would do next.

"You are unfortunate, lieutenant," said De Wet, after a quick glance at Morgan's uniform, "but you will have many friends to keep you company before another day."

"Don't be too sure, General," grinned Morgan. "Sanna's Post happened some time ago. We're searching every *donga* now."

De Wet laughed. He had engineered the Sanna's Post affair. Ambushed in a *donga*, he had captured nearly every wagon of Broadwood's convoy. The affair still rankled in British breasts at home. They did not appreciate the difficulties of African warfare.

"We will see," said De Wet. "Your General will attack, then it will be all over."

"No fear, he won't attack," asserted Morgan, with a confidence he was far from feeling.

De Wet smiled.

"My plans do not miscarry, as a rule," he said. "Has Piet Zeelander returned yet?" he added, to one of the group.

"Not yet, *Generaal*."

"Send him to me when he comes. I'm not going to ask you, lieutenant"—turning to Morgan—"to tell me the numbers of your army. I know you will not tell, and I have a fair idea, anyway. Are you hungry?"

"No, General. We've plenty of supplies, thank you."

"Good. Sanna's Post did not cripple you, then. Cornelius, take him to Commandant Van Reenen."

Cornelius, a pleasant-faced young Boer, took Morgan in tow, and handed him over to Commandant Van Reenen. A tall, heavily built man was Van Reenen, and his black beard spread fanwise over his great chest.

"The first," rumbled Van Reenen. "*Alle machtig!* An officer, too. Well, well, we have a good little home for him at Water-val."



MORGAN sat down beside Van Reenen and considered. Driscoll's Scout—and Morgan now doubted very much that he was one of Driscoll's men—had made a grave mistake. De Wet

was not at Van Tuyle's Hoek, and he was in a fair way to demolish Smith-Westerly. If Methuen—but Morgan knew that De Wet would not neglect Methuen. Some one was barring his path. It was evident that De Wet either knew the intention of the British or had outguessed them. Morgan shook his head dolefully. If he could only warn Smith-Westerly! But the *donga* was a thought too crammed with Boers. Up and down, wherever he looked, the burghers sat, stood, or strolled, each one with two bandoleers and a Mauser.

Morgan casually inquired who Piet Zee-lander might be. De Wet's mention of the name had roused his curiosity. It was so typically Dutch. But Van Reenen vouchsafed no information. He merely stared hard at Morgan and said he didn't know. The lieutenant felt sure that the Commandant was lying. He couldn't imagine why. He thought little of it, however, and changed the subject.

Smith-Westerly's batteries had ceased firing by now. His Lee-Metfords, too, were silent. Suddenly, faint and far away, sounded a field gun. Then the regular roll of volley-firing and the swelling crackle of many Mausers. Methuen had stumbled on the enemy!

"Your *Generaal* is now fighting," said Van Reenen, calmly ramming tobacco into his pipe with a great thumb. "Soon you will see more fighting. We will reach Cape Town in three months."

"Simon's Town, you mean," retorted Morgan.

"Cape Town," repeated the commandant tranquilly. "Then England, maybe. The world is flat, and we Boers have not forgotten the days of the *voor-trekkers*."

Morgan looked at the Commandant in amazement. He had often heard that some of the burghers believed with Kruger that the world was level as the *veldt*, but he had never met such a one before. Why, the man was a savage! And his people were capable of holding back and greatly annoying for many a weary month the troops of a civilized nation. It was inconceivable, but quite true. The present situation proved that conclusively.

Morgan drew a cigarette from his case and lit it. As he flirited the match away, big raindrops splashed his wrist. He looked up. Heavy black clouds were drawing swiftly across the sky. More raindrops fell.

Faster and faster they came. Then with a swish and a roar the storm broke.

The wind swept through the *donga* and drove sheets of rain before it. Commandant Van Reenen took his Mauser under his coat and pulled his hat down over his eyes. The rain was descending in torrents, and a man could not see twenty feet. Morgan drew a long breath and gathered his knees under him. He glanced quickly about. Not a Boer was looking his way. All were too busy trying to keep dry.

Morgan struck the commandant under the ear, and sent him sprawling. Then he sprang at the opposite side of the *donga*. Morgan had almost reached the top before a Mauser cracked, and a bullet struck the earth within an inch of his head. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* went the Mausers. But the rain clogged sights, and Morgan rolled over the top unhurt. He leaped to his feet and ran blindly through the storm. He could not see where he was going, but he was safe. The Boers could not see either.

On and on ran Morgan, slipping, stumbling, falling over anthills and tripping on *wacht-een-beetje* bushes. Once he slid face downward into a *spruit*, and arose plastered with mud. Far to the right he knew Methuen was still fighting. The war of the storm drowned out the thunder of the British guns, and he wondered how Methuen was faring. If he could only reach Smith-Westerly before the attack!

He breasted a slope, crossed a *donga*, and came out on another slope. A long ridge was this one, and Morgan was pumped out long before he reached the top. He set his teeth and held on, staggering and reeling. Ten yards from the top he saw the sodden khaki uniforms and dripping helmets of his own regiment.

The M. I. came within an ace of shooting the mud-covered apparition. They recognized Morgan just in time, and a red-faced sergeant and a big corporal shoved their forearms under his armpits and helped him to the Colonel.



FIVE minutes later an orderly galloped across to Smith-Westerly and gave him Morgan's information, both as to De Wet's presence in the *donga* and the gross misinformation of Driscoll's scout. Smith-Westerly at once ordered the arrest of the scout. But the man had disappeared. A captain said he had seen

him walk off in the rain as the orderly galloped up.

That settled the matter in Smith-Westerly's mind. Her Majesty's forces had been hoaxed again, and a very serious hoax it might have been if Morgan had not escaped when he did. For Smith-Westerly had decided to attack the *kopjes* in front and the lone *kopje* on his flank, even as De Wet had planned it. Then there would have been one more reverse to be rehearsed at length in the papers, and perhaps a recall for Smith-Westerly.

But the rain furnished a chance of retrieval. Smith-Westerly ordered an advance on the *donga*. The 10th M. I. he sent to flank the *donga* and cut off the Boers' retreat. The 10th mounted and rode off in the rain, Morgan acting as guide. One infantry brigade remained in reserve, and the other advanced in three columns, the men very anxious to arrive at close quarters. They had been disappointed so often. The Boer would never wait for the steel.

The M. I. rode far out to the right, and skirted the lone *kopje* that had blazed at Morgan during his flight earlier in the day. The *kopje* was silent now, its high sides shrouded in mists and rain. At last the Colonel decided he had gone far enough, and he halted his men. The M. I. dismounted and fixed bayonets. Morgan wondered whether the Boers on the *kopje* would come to the aid of their brothers in the *donga*. He hoped they would. And he would have given three months' pay to come to hand-grips with Driscoll's scout.

Suddenly a rifle cracked from the direction of the *donga*. It was answered by the deep roar of Smith-Westerly's advancing infantry. The Mausers began to speak, and the infantry yelled again.

Then, in the rear of the M. I., a crowd of Boers ran down from the lone *kopje*. Three companies guarded the rear and they received the Boers joyously. Five rapid volleys drove the Boers back, and the three

companies followed them with the bayonets. But the Boers escaped to their horses, and the three companies returned, cursing their luck.

They came back in time to help their comrades stem the tide of De Wet's retreat from the *donga*. With Smith-Westerly using the bayonet on his front, De Wet decided to leave. He had not counted on the British doing a little surprising themselves. His departure was not easy. The 10th M. I. fell upon his flank and drove into it like a wedge. Smith-Westerly clung to his rear, tooth and nail. It was a good deal like a football game on a wet field. The Boers were the ball.

In the midst of the inferno, Morgan spied the man who had said he was Driscoll's scout. He was with three mounted Boers, and riding hard. Morgan took a snapshot and dropped the man's horse. The fellow whirled off to one side, fell, and sprang to his feet. Before he could run, a bullet fired by one of the infantry struck him in the back of the head, and he went down in a crumple.

The rout was complete, and Smith-Westerly was delighted. So was Methuen, for he had met Delarey and driven him from his position. He could not have done this if Smith-Westerly had not beaten De Wet. Of course Morgan got no credit. Subalterns never do. But Morgan didn't care. He took a Boer prisoner over to look at the body of Driscoll's Scout.

"Know his name?" asked Morgan.

"Yes, that is Piet Zeelander," answered the prisoner. "He was De Wet's aide. It is too bad he was killed. He was a good man."

"Hm-m, yes," said Morgan, "he was a good man. No wonder Van Reenen would say nothing about him. I'd like to know how he managed to get back to De Wet, though."

But that was something Morgan never found out.



That Prodigious Postscript

A Tale of the
Very Woolly West
by John Lewis



FIRST we called him the Boob; then the Tenderfoot; then the Postscript. We listed him as a weakling and human jest. And it required the final baptism of blood, crashing guns and hurtling lead to bring out his real name and prove him what he was—a man!

Of course, when it was all over and his brief but tumultuous career in Lucky Lode was ended, we made a feeble attempt to frame an alibi for our senses by charging our mistakes against his clamorous attire and innocent appearance. But it was a weak defense and would not have swayed a jury afflicted with paresis.

When the Boob, on a July morning, erupted from the accommodation train in a simoon of suit-cases and handboxes, we should have looked beyond the veneer of flamboyant clothing to the six-foot-two of bone and muscle it concealed. Instead of staring at the trivial hat, with its wide red, white and blue band, we should have looked beneath the narrow brim at those remarkable eyes that could change in an instant from expressionless glass marbles into green slits with red rims, which gave his wedge face much the appearance of an undismayed bobcat.

And though the verdant youth in his colorful raiment looked a cross between an ambitious aurora borealis and six blocks of

Broadway on Saturday night, we should have noted below the spotless cuffs the tanned and knotted hands that could be doubled into fists resembling the business end of a Zulu war-club. Surely they were the hands of one who had done his share in carving a new empire out of desert wastes and mountain peaks. But we were the slaves of first impressions.

Lucky Lode was the little town we had builded in the Arizona borderland on a tottering foundation of prairie-dog holes and prospectors' hallucinations. For most of us, it was bounded on the east by requisition-papers, on the north by a sheriff's posse, and on the south and west by the infernal regions and bottomless pit.

The town always turned out to welcome the accommodation train. Coming up through Gopher Pass from Three Buttes, it was alleged to arrive daily at 10 A. M., but its batting average was about .115. The one car that dawdled behind a palsied engine was divided into a howling plurality of caboose and a weak minority of day coach. It was this car that gave to us our greatest surprise package in the shape of the Boob and his miscellaneous baggage.

I never could figure why he singled me of all the gaping horde, speared in my direction with a bony finger and hurled the question that brought snickers from the crowd:

"What might be the name of what you

call your best caravansary, my good friend?"

Smiley Pete held it was because I am a college man, as the Boob surely must be, and my brands, not yet hair-grown, still show. Coming events wholly discredited Smiley and, besides, I had been in Lucky Lode for five years—long enough to live down my college reputation and have the name—Geoffrey Osmer Laurence Denham—under which I had struggled through the Boston Technical Institute, cut to initial stinginess—merely as "Gold."

I had won a considerable place in the affections of Lucky Lodeites—true men and good friends—who could bust a bronc, smell out a mine or go down into the Valley of the Shadow for a comrade, but who, to save their guns, could not have told the difference between a preparatory school and "The School for Scandal."

The Boob's voice, shrill as a willow whistle, so abashed me it was necessary for him to repeat:

"What might be the name of what you call your best caravansary, my worthy friend?"

I finally recovered sufficiently to reply to the lean traveler who was as barren of meat as a vegetarian's ice-box and who resembled the late afternoon shadow of somebody else:

"We don't call it that, stranger, and you'd better not either. Doc Noble, who runs the Noble House, our best hotel, is a humble man, very tardy on words, but surprisingly punctual with a forty-five. Just last week he transformed a perfectly good tourist into a mediocre funeral cortège for referring to his place as a café."

The sarcasm left the Boob as unruffled as a partridge on a worm fence. He merely smiled a six-inch smile and pulled his cuffs down another two inches. Think of it—cuffs in Lucky Lode!

"That's what I seek—a hotel," he said.

"Your language was a bit over our heads," I replied, "but, being an alien myself, I inferred from your speech that you yearned for a bed, and from your general emaciation that you seek hash. Both can be had at Doc Noble's evaporated fruitery and bunk horror."

"Thanks, my excellent friend," he spoke through the dentist's gold which made his mouth look like a tooth-founder's show-window. "Can you tell me if there are those

unemployed whereabouts who would move my bags to this Noble hostelry?"

With what I thought was fine irony, but which never touched him, I came back:

"That hostelry word is some better than caravansary, if you're going to tarry with Doc. Now back of the depot you'll find a couple of sleeping Mexicans. Kick each one in the thorax, give them four bits and they'll move your bags. They'd move Crested Butte for less."



IT WAS when the procession at last got under way for Noble's wickiup that a rechristening took place. From "the Boob" we quickly changed to "the Postscript," for on all his suit-cases were the initials "P. S."

Some held out for "the Tenderfoot," but the majority argued that even a flinty-headed tenderfoot occasionally gave forth sparks of human intelligence, whereas this latest import had merely displayed a head which, while it might be ornamental, would never be much vogue as a thinking apparatus.

Dave Prosser, so accurate at deduction that without being detected he had, as bartender of the Fashion Saloon, deducted a comfortable competency from the till, settled matters by saying:

"Th' postscript is allus th' last an' th' best, leastwise in what commoonications I get f'om home. This animated fashion-plate is certain th' last word. I'm both horns for callin' him th' Postscript."

Smiley Pete advanced his college theory while we were at what Doc Noble libelously called dinner, but which as usual consisted of parboiled salthorse and abject apology:

"It's the inadequate an' frivolous hat an' his general array that convinces me this youth is recent from a frat. house. Only in the dormitory of a center of learning would they bow down to such a wardrobe."

Coming from a college myself, I knew the statement was malicious slander, but I could not afford to risk my Lucky Lode standing in battling for the Postscript, who wore a gray sack suit patterned after an awning, a purple necktie in shade-harmony with his blooming Adam's apple, and a vest which was the closing chapter on anarchy. Diamond scarf-pin, diamond rings, the log-chain that held his watch, and patent-leather shoes merely emphasized the hat, which was surely the crowning reproach.

"An' what do you think his name is?" continued Pete. "He insisted on registerin', an' Doc had to let him use th' day-book. Listen! Percival Simpkins, Philadelphia. I'm for indictin' that college."

"College ——!" sputtered Matt the Mex, sitting at my right and defying apoplexy with an over-large hunk of salt-horse. "Indict th' parents who names this yere shorthorn. To burden a weaklin' thataway borders on manslaughter. Up in the Tres Hermanos we lynches parents for less."

But Smiley was not to be turned from his quest for the college scalp. I think he was envious of my classical rearing and wanted to gambrel me while I was down. He appealed to me, admitting that while I might be a college graduate and a mining engineer who certainly knew the difference between a hydraulic hoist and a salted copper claim, I must confess the smelter run of seminaries was principally insane yells, spectacular garments, spitball pitchers and curvature of the spine.

Matt the Mex interrupted my reply and closed the argument and the dinner by saying, as he glanced across to where the Postscript was sitting:

"Hang th' parents, says I again. They're accessories before th' fact, so hang 'em before th' fact. I announces right here that I'm goin' t' ride herd on th' goat of this yere sample o' criminal haberdashery. An' that goes as she lays. See!"

II



MATT THE MEX was an insurrection that should have been quelled long ago. Drinking with him approached a solution of perpetual motion. Formerly a faro dealer at the Gold Nugget, a morose and sullen disposition coupled with a propensity for shooting lead into the diaphragms of patrons had caused him to be discharged for the good of the service.

Also he had acquired the habit of drinking alone, wherefore he kept in his room a bulging demijohn which gave forth something that smelled of wood alcohol and tasted like refined creosote.

After Doc Noble's ignoble repast, the better element of Lucky Lode hurdled over to the Gold Nugget, the most *recherché* combination of drink-palace, dance-hall and gambling-hell in town. Ed Graves piloted the resort, and opinion differed between

whether his roll was only sufficient to choke a yearling steer or big enough to dam Clear Creek. Anyway, Ed had never declared himself as tapped.

Percival, all lit up, drifted with the throng, but Matt the Mex went into executive session with his private jug.

One sure way to the heart of Lucky Lode is to lavish a round of drinks on the populace, and the Postscript chose even a shorter cut to public esteem by negotiating two rounds. True, we looked askance at the seltzer and lemon he ordered, but in the Southwest a man can usually drink what he likes, call himself what he wants to and forget the warrant out for him in the home town. In spite of a dark past and many aliases, he may live on unrebuked, providing he minds his own business and always backs his gun-plays.

That night back at a faro-table we first saw Percival's change of eyes. The youth was contributing toward offsetting the expense of the place, and incidentally demonstrating that he knew just about as much of the inner cussedness of faro as a burro does of the recall.

He began with a total disregard of the case-keeper's buttons, and persistently allowed his money to ride on a dead card through the last half of a deal. Of course when the play was completed and his bet was returned with a few appropriate remarks from the dealer, he bewailed the *faux pas* and vehemently promised to sin no more.

While Percival was traversing the high card bypath at about two dollars a step, Matt the Mex, fresh from corrosive sublimated libations, slipped into the chair at his side. Nudging the youth in the ribs, the Mex began by announcing:

"You Postscript, Tenderfoot, Boob, Percy—whatever in —— you call yourself—I've got blood in my eye, an' so I tell you!"

Percival turned on him, gave him a mild look and replied as he pulled a delicate cambric thing from his pocket:

"Why, dear me, so you have! Here, take this and wipe it out."

While the sarcastic retort was eating into the boiler-plate affair Matt fraudulently claimed as a head, Percival carelessly laid a few silver dollars on the high card. When the deal came "high," Matt reached out a hairy paw for the money as though it were his. Quick as a flash, Percy started to grab

it and the silver was scattered over the board. Both men leaped to their feet, and in a calm tone the Postscript said:

"That's my money, Mr. Plain Drunk, and you know it!"

"You're a liar; it's——"

That was the end of Matt's angora-annexing crusade.

Bing! One of those ham-fists landed bludgeon-style on the point of Matt's chin, whereupon that gentleman became a mere bundle of clothes. He described a complete parabola in the air and landed with his head nestling fondly against the unsympathetic leg of a roulette-table. He drew up his feet once or twice, as if he were endeavoring to get a strangle hold by wrapping them around his neck, his left hand clutched blindly at yesterday, while his right hand reached feebly into a distant hence. Then he straightened and took the count. Matt the Mex was down and out.

Percival Simpkins walked over to the prostrate bad man, turned him over, reached into the hip pocket and pulled out a revolver. Laying it on the roulette-table he said to the man who presided over that deadfall:

"Will you kindly hand this to the bully when he awakens? I reckon he won't feel like using it, but if you have any deep yearning for his continuation in this town you might quietly intimate to him that I know he lugs a gun."



EVEN after this object lesson, the Postscript was not to proceed in quietude. Texas Beecham was the next man on the batting list to strike out; that same night too.

Texas was a compatriot of Matt the Mex, and a minority stockholder in the demijohn and contents aforesaid. He was also possessed of considerable renown as a truculent killer, but it had been observed many times that the mortality for which he was responsible was mostly confined to those who notoriously went about unarmed, and to others on whom he could secure a sure drop with his facile guns. There are many so-called bad men of the same sort rampanting up and down the trails of the Southwest.

So pusillanimous was Texas when it came to offering refreshment to others that, on this particular night, when he declared he stood ready to buy, there was a near-panic in the Gold Nugget. We felt sure some-

thing was going to happen—and it did.

The Postscript still proved faithful to his seltzer and lemon, and the rest of the crowd were served. Texas, keenly feeling his partner's knock-out, glanced down the bar until his baleful eye rested on the offending liquid in Percy's hand. Up flashed the ready gun, pointed squarely at that wondrous purple necktie, and Texas yapped out:

"No nussing-bottle diet here, you bean-pole son of a flagstaff sire! I'm buying this, an' you'll drink whisky! Likewise if you bat a' eye while doin' it I'll shoot it out!"

Slowly Percival lowered his frivolous drink to the bar while his jaw sagged like it was on a loose hinge. Then he plaintively answered:

"Don't you think it is very rude and uncouth to solicit a man to partake of liquid refreshment and then insist on dictating the menu?"

This high-toned reply was a trifle too much for the battley Texas. A worried look passed over his wicked lineaments, his hand trembled and his bristling arsenal wavered the fraction of an inch. It was enough for the Postscript. Quick as light two tiny guns appeared in his fan-like hands. We never knew just where they came from. Some said he had them up his capacious sleeves; others insisted they jumped out of the pockets of his flapping coat. They were directed full at Beecham's face, resembling ordinarily in warts and color a Hubbard squash, but now quickly changing to the newest Fall shade in pumpkins.

"Now, my wolf-hearted friend," said Percival, as we saw those eyes go to the slit stage again, "I'll teach you the folly of selecting your prey with reckless abandon. Put that gun on the bar! No, no; the butt toward me, please. That's right, no tricks. And you'll drink water—not only this round but the next, which I will buy. I know that will be cruel and unusual punishment, but it may cool the raging fever of your blood."

"And," he continued as he glanced around, "if there are any more of your breed here who want to write my bills of fare, now is the time for them to get their pencils out."

Of course after these two skirmishes, like the nine-days-old pup we should have commenced to get our eyes open, but as we drifted Noble homeward, Smiley Pete still insisted the two acts of the play were flukes, merely circumstantial evidence to back his

contention that college turned out nothing but accidents and fallacies, and that before the final curtain the Postscript would surely fall heir to much assorted trouble.

I rather thought so myself. Indeed, I was the most incorrigible of the lot, for the further private acquaintance I had with Percival the next afternoon served not to enlighten me.

Riding down from the Glorious Betsy mine, I ran athwart his trail up on the *mesa*. I watched him snip the necks off half a dozen bottles, set up like tenpins a hundred feet away and listened to his explanation that he had learned the gun-trick at school.

While it occurred to me that his early education must have been acquired in a shooting-gallery, I said nothing, and even held my peace when he pettishly complained he could only score on four necks out of five because a deceitful storekeeper had worked off on him what he suspected were fire-crackers instead of the ammunition he had ordered.

But the big show came off that night, so let us lope hastily to the Gold Nugget, the scene thereof.

III



FOR three days Lucky Lode had been afflicted with one of those cancers upon the body politic known as a street fair. The usual equipment of Boscos, Diablos and Dips of Death had brought every miner out of the hills and every puncher from the cattle camps. Gold Nugget trade was brisk, and Ed Graves displayed at every table stacks of gold and wads of currency of impressive caliber.

The gaming-room was behind the bar, separated by two swinging glass doors, and beyond this room with its two crap injustices, its pair of faro frauds and its one roulette swindle was a cubby-hole where stud-poker paranœics persistently fed an eager kitty.

Along about eleven o'clock when everything was wide open and the clink of money and chips, the monotonous voices of the dealers and the shuffle of dancers and squawk of fiddles overhead were all jumbled together, the door of the stud-poker room was slammed, a key grated in the lock, and a man with two revolvers in his hands jumped into the middle of the main gambling hall and cried:

"Hands up, all! Everybody! No rough house, unless you force one!"

At the first word every dealer found himself staring into the internal economy of a gun. Five men who a few seconds before had apparently been players, suddenly became five hold-ups. Everything became so quiet you could hear the grating of the leader's heel as he swung around, guns leveled, until he had sized up the whole room. Then came the next order:

"Every one except the dealers and the lookouts—all hands—traipse over and face the walls. Keep your hands up. Lively now, boys!"

We obeyed as if we had been drilling for days. We were under the enemy's shooting-irons and there was no sense in showing fight. As the boss of the gang glanced around, the silence was broken by one of the faro dealers who said hoarsely more to himself than to any one else:

"The Desert Pest, or I'm a Yaqui squaw!"

"Yes, the Desert Pest," answered the robber who was playing the lead and of whom we had all heard, "and don't pester him and he'll not pester you long. We've no time or desire to pillage individuals; that's proved by quarantining the poker players. Get out the sacks, boys."

Each of the five assistants threw on the table in front of him a canvas bag like the ones used in sending ore samples to an assayer.

"Now, you dealers, put your gold and currency in the bags—all there is in the rack and drawer—never mind the silver. And remember, I know you've each got a gun in your drawer, but please be nice and don't try to use it. We don't want to turn this place into a slaughter-house!"

The dealers mechanically obeyed while nearly a hundred patrons of the games nosed the walls and tried to reach the ceiling with the tips of their fingers. Just as the bulk of Ed Graves's fortune had rattled into the sacks, the clatter of high-heeled shoes was heard out in the bar, the doors swung open and, behold! Percival Simpkins stood within the room!

"Get back there, you blithering fool!" shouted the Pest.

But Percival was not so easily put to frenzied rout. One hesitating glance he swept over the room and noted all there was to see: A hundred cowards trying to climb

a wall, ten overawed dealers and lookouts yielding up Ed Graves's ill-gotten gains, and six cleared-for-action malefactors ready to receive great wealth.

The brief hesitation caused the leader's ire to flame. There was a bang and a crash as one of the Pest's bullets knocked out a section of the glass door at Percival's side big enough to stick your head through.



THEN things began to happen, and I presume there was a quick shift from the Simpkins' marble eyes to the Simpkins' red-green eyes, but I could not see from where I was trying to crawl into a six-inch hole, originally intended as a stove-pipe terminus.

With the sound of the robber's gun the Postscript gave one leap that brought him well inside the room. Again the two little revolvers leaped from nowhere and twinkled under the lights. A shot rang out and the Pest fell flat on his face, his two arms still clutching the two guns, outstretched on the floor! His was surely a speedy sailing to unknown shores.

The youth turned and, with the revolver in his left hand, fired almost point-blank into the face of the man at the roulette-table. That unfortunate gave one gasp and pitched over, his blood spurting on to the well-filled sack toward which he had been reaching when the bullet ripped through his brain.

But now the robbers at the faro and crap tables began to get industrious. Their guns banged, and hurtling lead smashed glass and woodwork. Through streaks of fire and smoke and awful calamity Percival advanced, shooting as he came. The desperado at the first faro-table, pursued by the same hard luck that follows all men at faro-tables, fired at him and missed. The young man turned half around, gave a contemptuous snort, took deliberate aim, and almost with the gun-pop the bandit toppled to the floor, a ghastly wound in his neck.

Courage returned to the dealers' breasts when they no longer gazed into bristling revolvers, and their own weapons came into play, adding to the din of the fusillade. The man at the second faro-table fell, riddled with bullets. It just seemed as though no one at those faro-tables could win anything but a surplus of lead.

The crowd in a frenzy surged back from

the walls, men rushed in from the bar-room, the penned-up stud-poker devotees battered down the door and the firing ceased.

The next few moments were very unsympathetic toward Ed Graves's hopes of salvage. In the confusion, the two bandits who had covered the dealers of the crap games grabbed the sacks of money from those tables, made their way through the pushing crowd, picked up the cash from the second faro-table and from the roulette game, and under cover of the smoke slipped through the splintered doors into the bar-room and out into the street. They ran to the horses they had left but a half-hour before, each heaved his two sacks of money into gaping saddle-bags, then mounted, turned and, as a parting salute, fired two shots through the front window. They then galloped south toward safety and the land of the Aztecs.

Within the Gold Nugget two players had been wounded by stray bullets and a faro dealer had shuffled his last deck. Six robbers had come to loot; four would loot no more; two had escaped and with them had gone forty thousand dollars in gold and greenbacks! Out in the bar-room a man lay dead. That last defiant salute cost the bartender his life.

Then it was that game Ed Graves offered ten thousand dollars for the capture of the robbers, with or without stolen money and alive or dead, with the loud pedal on the "dead." Even as the pronunciamento went forth, men who had witnessed the stormy strife of one against six looked around for Percy of the happy attire and accurate aim. That redoubtable warrior had disappeared.

Thirty minutes could not have slipped by before a quartet of posses were out in different directions raking the country with a fine-tooth comb for the two survivors of the sudden wealth band. They sleuthed around for about forty-eight hours and then one by one and empty handed they straggled back into Lucky Lode. One bunch reported the men had forded Clear Creek a couple of miles out of town and had evidently walked their horses down-stream, for the trail was lost on the other side. The pursuit was abandoned; the fleeing pair were no doubt safe in Mexico where many an outlaw finds surcease from lynx-eyed sheriffs and deputies.

IV

X ON AN afternoon four days after the robbery, a strange procession moved up what Lucky Lode dignified by the name of Main Street. It consisted of three men, dust-covered, mud-stained and sun-dried. One of them, bedraggled and hatless, with a dirty handkerchief fastened turbanwise on his head, making him look like a piratical Captain Kidd, was mounted on a pony that ambled stiffly and shook a weary head in mute protest against the digging heels of its rider. From the man's left wrist a revolver hung by a leather thong. His right hand was stuck into his shirt in imitation of a sling. A great dark splotch on an ex-gray coat showed clearly that he had been shot through the shoulder.

The other two men were afoot, staggering under the weight of heavy bags, and were being driven along with about as much loving kindness as is usually lavished on a personally conducted burro outfit.

The three halted in front of the Gold Nugget where a crowd quickly gathered from nowhere. Ed Graves pushed his way through and greeted the elongated scarecrow that adorned the horse:

"Well, if this don't beat a pat flush! It's the Postscript!"

"Yep, it's the Postscript," replied the gaunt rider, as he stood on his long legs and allowed the tired pony to walk from under him. "And here's your men; likewise your coin. Pardon me for bringing them in alive, but they plugged me pretty hard, as you see, before I could shoot their horses and if I'd killed them I would have had to carry the money myself. It's some heavy, so I figured to make them do that. I'm ready to collect."

While the crowd gaped in wonderment, Graves cried:

"But how did you locate them, kid, when the whole town gave it up?"

A sickly grin split the thin face of Percival as he answered:

"Say, did you ever hear the story of the small-town simpleton who found the horse that had strayed away and thus annexed the five dollars reward offered for the animal's return? When the owner asked him where he located the wandering steed, he replied, 'Wall, I just thought to myse'f, if I was a hoss an' I got loose, whar would I go, an' I went thar an' thar he was.' Now you see, I just thought to myself, if I were an outlaw with forty thousand in cash and a price on my head wher' would I go, and I went there and ——"

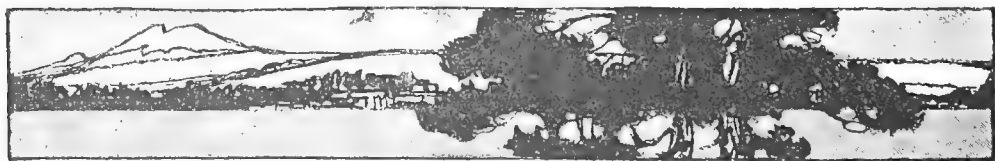
"Yes, but a tenderfoot!" interrupted Graves. "That's what gets me."

Then the real Percival Simpkins stood forth. With a frown on his face and a sneer pulling down his tight lips he snarled:

"Oh, for the love of Arizona, choke it! Because I come down here in some exhilarating attire and a trifling hat I found in the room of a fellow who got out of town about three hops ahead of an unpaid board-bill, you size me up as trivial and worthless. The gang that pillaged this joint of yours was the same that held up the bank at Silver City last week. One of them was shot, but with his last painful wheeze he tipped it off that this Gold Nugget was the crowd's next lighting-place. They pulled the stuff a day ahead of schedule or I'd have bagged——"

"But—but—you—a tenderfoot!" again spluttered Graves, floundering on to destruction.

"Tenderfoot ——!" snapped the transformed Percival, as he kicked his disgust into the ribs of one of the cowering outlaws. "My name's Siddons—Park Siddons—Skin Park. See! I'm sheriff up in Jicarilla County. The only time you were right was when you voted me college bred. I am. I once took a correspondence course in horse sense. Lucky Lode might use something of the sort. Gimme a drink—whisky this time—man's size—if in such a benighted village there is any whisky that wasn't aged with blue vitriol!"



The Crimson Tracks



by
Hugh Pendexter

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE FOOTPRINTS

MY TRIP to the quiet little village of Swackton promised to be as good as a vacation, though my employer, Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, had ordered me there on the business of his unique Bureau of Abnormal Litigation. The business had to do with the Vingt estate, valued at nearly a million dollars. But beyond this one fact I knew nothing of the nature of my errand. My employer had gone into no details, yet his half decision to accept a retainer was a guarantee of the unusual.

"No need of your hearing the alleged facts twice," he had said, when in applying for instructions I had intimated my desire to learn something beyond my destination. "Simply go to Swackton and listen to whatever a Miss Marilla Vingt has to say. She has written me at some length, but I wish you to weigh her statements with a fresh and unprejudiced mind. I will notify her to call on you, so you both may meet in a neutral environment.

"If her request impresses you as being immaterial and susceptible of an ordinary, routine remedy, you may refer her to some prosy, in-the-rut lawyer. If it promises to be a case requiring expert treatment, take such steps as you may deem necessary and keep me advised. Theoretically,

your train leaves at 10:10. Goodby."

Thus far I had put in two dreamy days, entirely satisfied with the relaxation. On the evening of the second day, while wondering when our prospective client would reveal herself, the proprietor of my sleepy inn informed me I was wanted in the prim, old-fashioned parlor.

On entering I beheld a little, old woman, whose sharp eyes sparkled in an otherwise dull, stolid face. Her head was greatly disproportionate to her slight body. What accentuated the unusual width of her facial features and held my attention were the sparks radiating from her enormous earrings, the like of which for size and color I had never seen outside a Tiffany display.

"Miss Vingt?" I said, bowing.

"I am," she replied in a low, metallic voice that put one in mind of an automaton and seemed entirely apart from her physical presentment. "And you are Mr. Butterworth, of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation?" I believed, despite the monotone in her query, that she was a shade disappointed. I was confirmed in this suspicion when she added, "I had expected and hoped to meet a man of more years."

I hurriedly explained I was merely Mr. Butterworth's first assistant; yet assured her that I was quite competent to consider any proposition she might desire to make.

"I received a letter," she murmured, "saying I should call here. I had expected to meet Mr. Butterworth in person. How-

ever, I suppose your being here in his stead is evidence of your discretion and ability."

I bowed in the stiff assurance of youth.

She studied me contemplatively, and then said suddenly: "I want your Bureau to obtain a literary injunction for me."

"A literary injunction?" I mumbled, sinking into a chair; for although constantly engaged in abnormal litigations, she caught me off my guard. Then, collecting my features into their ordinary cast I repeated, as if not understanding her, "You said a literary injunction?"

"Exactly," she murmured, as a child who speaks by rote; "I want Roger Vingt restrained, or whatever you call it."

"You would enjoin him from indulging in literary efforts?" I queried, now quite matter-of-fact in my demeanor.

"Well," she explained, "I only want a modified sort of an injunction. I want him compelled to keep his literary characters within the State. I should prefer to have him confine his narratives to the county; but that might be expecting too much."

"Miss Vingt," I begged, now keenly alive on the professional side, "your request is the ordinary one from our point of view, as all our cases are unusual. But won't you please cast back a bit and go into your reasons? You know, I have been told nothing. What leads up to your inclination, and who is Roger Vingt?"

She leaned back her head and half closed her bright eyes, and in a dull sing-song began: "Roger Vingt is the twin brother of Abel Vingt. They are my cousins. Roger arrived but recently in Swackton, shortly after the death of our uncle. We three will divide the Vingt estate. Abel and I supposed ourselves to be the only next of kin, as Roger ran away when a boy and has never been heard from in all these years."

"You don't dispute his claim?"

"No," she replied wearily; "both Abel and I conceded his relationship at the outset. We had believed at one time that our uncle made a will. We are now confident he died intestate."

"Very well. Go on," I encouraged.

"I will say first that Roger Vingt exercises a strange influence over me. In a lesser degree his arrival has affected Cousin Abel. I fear him, and yet am pleased to have him near me. He is a tall, powerfully built man, a masterful man despite his gentle ways, and one who has wandered much. I fear he has

spent his life amid scenes we Swackton people would at the least deem to be unwholesome. A livid scar, running from eye to ear, hints at violence. While his manner is always suave and merry, he is full of weird narratives that are ever tinged with lawlessness and which must be based upon experience. Why, I sometimes believe he has been a pirate! In fact, Abel, behind his back, often speaks of him as a pirate."

"There isn't much love lost between the brothers?" I suggested.

"Well," and she hesitated a bit, "I'll do Roger the justice to say he never shows any ill feeling toward Abel. But poor Abel is to be indulged. Since losing his legs in a railroad wreck he presents a poor figure, compared with Roger. Perhaps he is soured when reminded of the man he used to be. To see him confined to his wheel chair, while the ne'er-do-well only carries a scar, makes me almost doubt that correct living has its own reward. For poor Abel's sake, as well as my own, I shall be glad when the estate is settled up and Roger is paid off and takes his departure."



I HAD allowed her to ramble on for two reasons: I wished to get a bird's-eye view of the whole family, and I also wanted her to approach the reasons for her strange request in a thoroughly even frame of mind. So now I reverted to the proposed injunction order by saying: "Now we will touch upon Roger's literary aspirations. Why should he be restrained?"

"Because," she declared in the same even intonation, "whenever he comes up from the city he has some strange tale to tell me; tales that make my blood run cold. When he can't come he has them typewritten and sends them to me through the mail. He has no right to. He must stop it!"

"But, my dear Miss Vingt," I cried, almost in irritation, "it's all very simple. You don't need our services. Why do you listen to his narratives? Why do you read them? Why not restrain yourself?"

She opened and spread out her hands in a little gesture of helplessness, and with more of feeling in her voice astounded me by confessing: "I can't help it. I must be saved from myself. So surely as he begins to talk, so surely must I listen. When in his presence, I want to hear him give his experiences. When one of his manuscripts arrives, I must sit down and read it. And the result is my

nerves are being unstrung. I dream about his stories and in my waking hours fill in a lot of gruesome details where he has left a blank."

"Pardon me," I observed, "but you possess a peculiar mental make-up."

"I know," she sighed in her odd mechanical tone, "but my father was a dreamer, a visionary, and different from other men. Our uncle was a scientist, who searched for hidden truths. He amassed his fortune quite by accident. There is an unusual strain in the blood of all the Vingt. Despite the fact that I am an old woman, my mind is fanciful and susceptible, I regret to say, to any morbid suggestion. As a child I was thrown into brain fever by reading, surreptitiously, Poe's tales."

"But have you ever requested your cousin to desist?" I inquired.

"I have written him several times and asked him not to perturb me," she returned. "But when he is with me I have not the power to object. Once he laughed good-naturedly in the middle of a narrative and asked if I wanted him to stop. But I—I was so interested I begged him to continue."

"Then," I decided, "knowing your weakness, he has some motive. What?"

Again the trick with the hands as she replied, "I do not know. Cousin Abel has warned me to keep clear of his influence, and one day even snatched a manuscript from my hands and destroyed it."

"And what does Abel say the outcome will be, so far as you are concerned, if you continue to listen and read?"

"That I'll become a nervous wreck," she whispered, "and will be unable to act as his co-administrator. Not that I care much to participate in settling the estate, except as it would convenience him. His unfortunate condition necessitates his having an associate. He declares he will not have Roger, a bird of passage."

I could see now, I believed, the piratical cousin's object in besieging the spinster with unwholesome mental suggestions: either he planned to supplant her as administrator, or to influence her unduly once she began to settle the estate. Success in either circumstance meant he would obtain more than his share of the property. But I wondered at my employer's interest in the situation. I very well knew he could not be tempted by the mere knowledge that the estate was large. Perhaps his eccentric

mind was impressed by the originality of her request.

Now, having examined her and listened to her fears, I could find nothing to interest the Bureau. She was simply a weak-minded old woman, beset by an avaricious relative, whose probable desire to cheat her out of a portion of her share could be easily balked by any routine attorney at law. While I was considering the best way to refuse her retainer, she continued:

"If he only could be made to keep his heroes and heroines in the State, I could enjoy his talk and manuscripts and suffer no mental injury. Seems as if that might be done. Above all things it should be expressly set forth that he is to keep his characters off the high seas. His description of the awful things he saw in the Caribbean curdles my blood even now." And her hands seemed to shudder. "What do you think his last effort was about?" Her eyes were big and round with some emotion.

"Something fearsome," I yawned, for she was beginning to weary me.

"It was about a man who had committed murder, or something, and who left, wherever he went, a trail of crimson footprints," she continued, leaning forward with one finger on her thin lips while the earrings bobbed like balls of fire.

"I shall never forget it," she murmured. "It was typewritten in red, and since then I catch myself looking behind me, half expecting to behold red footprints pursuing me. To-night is the first opportunity I've had of visiting you unseen by Roger. He went to the city this afternoon. If I didn't expect him back to-morrow I would not have come here to-night for fear of the footprints. Of course, I do not care for him to know I've consulted a lawyer, unless something comes of it."

I smiled at her foolish terror, and was more decided than ever that another sun should see me back at the office, engaged in real work. Yet, she was an old woman and entitled to courteous consideration, and, smothering a facetious remark, I soberly observed: "The manuscript must have impressed you strongly. Cousin Roger evidently possesses real literary ability. Have you the yarn with you?"

"Oh, no," she murmured. "I would not bring it with me for the world." Then, as if reading my thoughts, she suddenly defended herself: "Don't think because I am along in

years and have lived a lonely life that I am so deeply agitated. I tell you, there is something uncanny about Cousin Roger. Despite his pleasant, soothing voice and kindly smile there is something in his presence that causes me to feel uneasy; and yet he fascinates me. Oh, dear! I can't explain it. But I'm not the only one who feels his influence; there is Mr. Kimper, our druggist."

"He also experiences a feeling of fear of Roger?" I asked skeptically.

"Well, I'll hardly say that; but he was affected by the red manuscript," she declared. "You see, I loaned it to him, and when he returned it he said it had made him feel creepy all over and that he wouldn't read another for any amount of money." The last was said almost triumphantly—that is, if one could imagine her monotonic voice taking on a new tone. And while I sat and stared she added: "And that proves others can be impressed by his personality, even if met with only on paper."

"But what do you consider to be the cause of all this shivery business?" I demanded. "Does the man possess hypnotic powers in such a degree as to extend the influence to you and this druggist through the medium of a typewritten page?"

"I don't believe in hypnotism," she said in her dispassioned way. "It's all bosh. You set me down for a foolish old woman, beset with crazy fears. Very well, I must look elsewhere for a lawyer. I'm sorry, as after reading of your Bureau's defense of the armless murderer I felt keen to have you represent me."

Then as she rose to terminate the interview, she declared, "Yet you'll admit it's peculiar that the druggist should suffer from the same inquietude after reading the manuscript."

Immediately I experienced a slight revulsion of feeling. She was old and easily imposed upon; yet she was entitled to a peaceful existence. It would be simple for me to call on Mr. Roger Vingt and forcibly suggest he leave her in peace. It was seldom the Bureau concerned itself in anything prosaic, but as the situation had been left with me and as I was not thoroughly hardened, I decided to pursue such a course, be it never so commonplace. So I soothed her: "Now, Miss Vingt, I simply desired to get at the bottom of this matter. Let me sleep on it, please; and we'll see if I can't

devise some simple remedy that will answer all purposes as well as your proposed injunction."

"Well," she sighed, still maintaining her usual placidity of features, while her metallic sing-song was only pitched in a higher key, "let it rest for the night, then."

As we reached the threshold she trembled against my arm, at the same time murmuring, "I can't throw off the feeling that something is about to happen."

"I'll walk home with you," I quieted. "Wait till I get my hat."

But even as I was turning from the hall rack I heard her give a low cry, intense in timbre, and bespeaking some deep emotion. Wondering what new freak had now assailed her, I ran hurriedly to her side.

"The footprints! the footprints!" she was moaning; and as she covered her eyes with one tremulous hand she pointed with the other at the pavement.

And there, in the circle of light cast by the veranda lamp, my startled gaze beheld dark footprints, which in the glare of day might easily be ruddy in color. And with mouth agape I realized that fiction had crystallized into fact and that the crimson footprints had come to Swackton.

CHAPTER II

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BANK

IT WOULD be difficult to describe my emotions as I stood at my window next morning and enjoyed a broad view of the listless village street. The footprints were red, and, from my coign of vantage, seemed to have made several stops. The first surprise exhausted, I had seen in them only a ruse to intimidate Miss Vingt. Yet my feelings were mixed, I say, as I now began to admire the persistent caliber of her Cousin Roger. He not only created a little drama, but he was willing to play the lead.

I had accompanied her home and had been permitted to read the sinister manuscript. Although devoid of technique, it possessed a virile note, as if a strong man were giving his own experiences; and I could appreciate the impress that might be left on the unsophisticated village folk by Roger's forceful, positive style of narration. It was obvious that the author was not a man who would fail in any undertaking for the lack of an original

expedient, and the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation was in business to deal with just such opponents.

So, on returning to my hotel I had caught the night mail and informed my Chief I had formally accepted charge of the spinster's affairs. I also detailed the coming of the tracks. That I had correctly anticipated a show of interest on his part was now demonstrated by the appearance of the short, chunky landlord, who puffed importantly to my door. He handed me a telegram from Mr. Butterworth, and waited expectantly, as I read:

Carefully observe itinerary and persons visited.

I confess I was a bit angry with myself for neglecting to set about this without complacently waiting for the yellow-backed reminder. I fear it is one of my failings to dawdle until the Chief jolts me into action. To make up the lost time I bolted a slim breakfast and set out on my little journey of investigation. Already apathetic housewives were scrubbing the crimson trail from the walks, and it was only in spots I could pick it up. The only comments I heard on the unusual visitation was the general opinion that the tracks had been left by mischievous students from a neighboring town. This easy solution of the nuisance amused me, although I was gravely debating the best means to prevent them from walking into a million-dollar estate.

My first stop was at the Kimper drugstore, where I found the proprietor, a diminutive, bald-headed man, waiting on some school-children at the soda-fountain. At first sight I concluded he was of nervous temperament and one who would worry excessively over trifles. This led me to decide it was not a fair test to measure the influence of Cousin Roger's masterpiece by the effect it might have on him.

"Mr. Kimper?" I casually inquired, as I looked over the magazines. "Yes, I'll take these. I like this chap's yarns; they're such thrillers."

He cocked his head with bird-like quickness and said, "I like the merry-hearted stories best. Lord, sir! there's enough trouble in every one's life without paying to read about the other fellow's hard times."

"Some one fond of fun has been busy since last night," I observed. "I suppose

you've seen the peculiar footprints that visited the village?"

"I've seen them," he contented himself with replying.

"Schoolboy's prank, eh?"

"Can't say, sir," he returned brusquely. "That's for Sheriff McDoty to find out."

"He's good at unraveling mysteries?" I queried.

"He thinks he is," said the druggist with a touch of impatience. "He was saying the other night he could unravel anything, if only given a chance."

"He has the opportunity now," I smiled, "even if it but leads to a sophomore."

"Yes," agreed the druggist, with a far-away look dulling his quick eyes, "and coming right on top of his boast it is almost a coincidence. Convenient for him, too. But, maybe, they won't lead to younkers."

I thought I began to see a light, and after a slight pause, queried, "Is McDoty running for office again this year?"

"Yes—he's running," was the laconic response, and the little man elevated his brows a notch and pursed his lips.

As his manner seemed to indicate a desire to end the gossip, I left him. Yet I firmly believed he was disgruntled over something. As I gained the sidewalk and turned I detected him peeping from behind the window's display of fishing-rods. He was either interested in me, a stranger; or in his assistant, who was now lazily eliminating the footprints.



BY THE time I resumed my quest the footprints had been largely scrubbed out; yet I managed to find another house which they had approached. This was the home of Abel Vingt, the cousin of our client. I had observed the night before that he and she occupied what was once an over-large country mansion but which had been remodeled into a double dwelling. As Miss Vingt was apprehensive of Roger's learning the step she had taken in retaining counsel, and as she had requested me to keep the matter secret even from Abel for a few days, I appreciated my errand was one demanding considerable diplomacy. My excuse, I decided, should be to inquire about village realty, as the Vingt estate embraced many pieces of property.

A thin charwoman, absorbed in a wealth of imprecations, was briskly washing the walk as I opened the gate. To convenience

the master's three-wheeled machine the walk was flush with the front door, the descent to the street being a gradual slope. The tracks led up to the very threshold; but they had not paused at Miss Vingt's gate.

Even as I was about to ring the bell the door swung open and I was face to face with the crippled owner. I stood silent for a few seconds, staring at him. His physical presentment was out of the ordinary and giving the impression he was all head and shoulders. The hands that grasped the levers of his machine were twice as large as mine. But it was his head in particular that focused my gaze. It was out of proportion to even his large frame and could not boast of a single hair. Apparently it was a physical characteristic of his race, and in this respect—the width of his facial features—he reminded me of his cousin very much.

"Know me again, do you think?" he asked in a booming bass.

"I beg pardon," I hurried to apologize; "I am a stranger and am anxious to acquire a little information in regard to that portion of Swackton realty which I have been told the Vingt estate will soon be in the market to dispose of. I thought——"

"Who told you?" he broke in sharply.

"I am but a representative of the city office, but I believe my employers received their information from your brother, Mr. Roger Vingt," I returned glibly, speaking as the exigence of the moment required.

"Huh!" he growled, and for a second wrinkles grew where his eyebrows should have been. Then he invited, or rather commanded: "Come in;" and his hands with one movement sent the machine flying backward until it had described a sharp curve and had shown me the way to the library. "So my amiable brother is anxious to have the estate settled up and turned into cash, eh?" he sneered, motioning me to a chair.

As I studied him at leisure and could feel the cold, clear calm of his frozen nature radiating from every pore, I fell to wondering what kind of man Roger must be. I almost decided Miss Vingt was obsessed by prejudice against the wrong kinsman. For if the literary wanderer were more unprepossessing than this stunted hulk, he must be a rare specimen, I assured myself.

Then I realized I had made no return to his last query, and I awkwardly suggested,

"Possibly he is anxious, as you say, to leave the quiet of your village."

"I said nothing of the kind," he coldly denied. Then for the first time raising his voice above its naturally hoarse level, he cried, "But if I thought he would clear out, satisfied with his legitimate share, I'd gladly sell every yard of dirt we own—that is, at a fair valuation." And with this cautious addendum his basilisk eyes glowed with avarice.

"You are twin brothers?" was my rather inconsequential return.

"Yes," he growled, straightening his mouth in a wide, hard line. "But I sometimes think it would have been more appropriate if he'd mated up with the devil."

"I never saw him," I said, neutrally.

"You weren't at your office when he called, then?" he inquired, more carelessly, studying his nails.

Evidently he was of a suspicious nature; but I smiled blankly and replied, "No. In fact, I believe he 'phoned in."

"Well, don't go out of your way to meet him," he advised grimly. "Lots of folks are better off for never having enjoyed his companionship. But this isn't talking real estate. All I can say about the property is, that we shall be willing to sell a number of lots and houses, once the surrogate has appointed administrators. My cousin, Miss Vingt, and myself will be appointed. You can call on either of us after the return day in court. Only, if my pirate brother seeks to lead you to believe the property is going for a song—just to convenience him in getting hold of ready money—he's mistaken. That's all."

I now regretted having assumed the rôle of real-estate dealer with him. It meant I had some elaborate explaining ahead of me when once he learned I was Miss Vingt's lawyer. Not that it was any of his business, as we had to do with Roger's unwholesome inclination only; yet if he took umbrage at the little deceit, I could see where we lost a fat fee by not appearing for the two of them; that is, for him and Miss Vingt. However, it was no time now to reveal anything, and as his hands were impatiently fingering the levers, I rose and thanked him and turned to go; at the threshold I paused and observed, "I see you have been visited by the red foot-prints."

His broad, heavy face almost displayed astonishment as I said it.

"The what?" he demanded slowly.

"The red footprints," I repeated, and then jocosely added: "They seem to have made quite a few calls during the night. They lead to your door, they dropped in on the druggist; and I'm told they tagged the Sheriff around."

Despite his mask-like face I felt doubly sure my intelligence had perturbed him. He was acquainted with the red manuscript, and in detecting Roger's use saw something sinister in it all. "Did they call on my cousin, next door?" he finally asked, after mopping his head with his sleeve.

"Really, I don't know," I lied. "I only noticed they came up your walk."

This partiality puzzled him and he seemed to forget my presence as he stared at the front wheel of his machine and pursed his lips thickly.

"A schoolboy's prank," I added, again turning to go.

This time he did not deter me, but grumbled, as he wheeled at my heels to the door: "Well, they seem to have a predilection for bald-headed men."

"Is McDoty bald-headed?" I asked.

"The most charitable would have to concede it," he assured me gloomily.

Although I caught a glimpse of her broad, expressionless face at the window and noticed her hands were plucking the curtains in seeming agitation, I passed Miss Vingt's door with no show of recognition. Abel did not offer to accompany me up the street, but halted his machine at the gate and watched the woman clean the walk.

Before returning to my hotel I paid another visit to the drug-store, and after calling for a glass of soda, carelessly inquired, "Sheriff McDoty is bald-headed, is he not?"

Kimper turned from the faucet, as if my query were unwelcome, and his scant eyebrows were drawn in a slight frown as he slowly nodded his head, and in a low voice demanded, "Why do you ask?"

"Mr. Vingt was saying," I explained, "that the red footprints had a predilection for men without hair."

He eyed me uneasily for a moment, and then confessed. "It may strike you as childish, but I don't like those footprints. I can't make myself agree with the neighbors that any schoolboy made them. Ha! bald-headed men, eh?" And he gently caressed his shining poll, while his eyes ranged along

a shelf of bottles that promised on their labels much hirsute adornment.

I laughed behind my glass in speculating as to how far Cousin Roger's nerve-destroying effort might radiate. It impressed me that the schemer had gone a bit too far at the very outset, and in addition to frightening one old woman was in a fair way to minimize the desired result by engulfing in disquietude every bald-headed man in Swackton. Then my thoughts were given another trend by the druggist's observing:

"If you intend locating here you'll see a pretty fight this Fall when McDoty runs for his second term of office. By the way, which Vingt mentioned him?"

I told him, and he nodded his head sagely. "Abel don't like him. I guess he'd not feel badly to see him mixed up in the footprints some way. He's hinted to me he'd like to see a dark horse put up against Mac."

"Is Roger against him?" I asked.

"No, I think not," slowly decided the little man, leaning over the counter in a confidential posture and speaking softly. "You see, the twins usually hold different views, although Roger is always good-natured in expressing an opinion. But as he hasn't grown up with the town and as he will clear out, once he gets his share of the money, he hasn't the influence Abel has. But he'd like to see Mac elected, just to annoy his brother."



AS I set off for dinner I found myself trying to figure out whether McDoty, through friendship, would in any way aid Roger in his maneuvers. The office of sheriff paid but poorly, and the prospective sharer in a million-dollar estate might be able to purchase much immunity. I began to believe there was one more quantity in my little equation; my experience in the afternoon cemented this into a conviction.

It was in Kimper's store. His was a genial lounging-place and the one center, with the hotel veranda excepted, where a stranger could study the village life without attracting more than casual attention. I went there, as it was McDoty's stamping-grounds. A certain little circle preferred the hotel and had been encumbering the veranda for years; another certain group was loyal to the druggist and never dreamed of a new rendezvous. My New England training had taught me this, and I realized that to find a man in a particular haunt to-day evidenced

he would be there to-morrow. And McDoty's habitat, despite all political differences, was the drug-store.

My excuse was urgent correspondence. Kimper good-naturedly allowed me to use his desk, once I had made a goodly purchase of very poor cigars, and the few loungers behind the prescription counter practically ignored me. The Sheriff was the focal point of my interest and my ears were cocked in the most approved eavesdropping fashion when he made a remark. The circle was well under way when I quietly appropriated the desk.

"The footprints led right up to your door, Kimper," one man was declaring as I took my seat.

"They entered," corrected the Sheriff, his heavy beard and smooth pate lending to the impression that his face was upside down.

"Not so bad as that," remonstrated Kimper hurriedly and in a testy tone. "They might have entered if the doors had been unlocked." And after a moment he added, "I guess no harm has been done."

"No physical harm as yet," agreed the Sheriff. "But who knows what may happen? I, for one, am honest enough to admit I don't like the notion of being dogged around by some unknown, even in sport. Abel Vingt says the footprints have a fancy for bald-headed men. Very well; while it may be only a coincidence, and while I have no idea what they mean, except as they violate a village ordinance by mussing up the sidewalks, I am going to meet them this way."

And my furtive gaze caught him pouring some pungent fluid into a hollowed palm, after which he shampooed his head briskly.

As my locality began to smell like a barber-shop he continued: "What's the damage for the bottle?" and he threw some money on the counter, explaining to his gaping companions, "If growing a head of hair will save me from being annoyed, I guess it's worth while to make a try for it."

"Bosh!" mumbled the druggist uneasily. "You attach too much importance to it. I ain't warranting that stuff to grow anything, mind you."

"Be a joke on my wife if I grew a lid," sheepishly chuckled another. "She's never seen me except as bald-headed as a egg. Gimme a bottle."

"I always go along with the boys," de-

clared the fourth man with a feeble smile. "Make it two, Kim."

As I had paused overlong and did not wish to court attention, I now withdrew, satisfied that interest had deepened in the footprints, but puzzled by the Sheriff's bearing.

It was past nine o'clock when, at a telephoned request, Miss Vingt glided up the walk to find me waiting on the cool, deserted veranda. At my suggestion we remained outside in a dark corner.

"I will detain you but a moment," I said. "I want the city address of your cousin Roger."

"I can't give it," she murmured, drawing her shawl about her as if the night were chilly. "I never asked him. All his communications to me are posted at the Madison Square station. You see, I never asked him anything about himself. When he is with me he does all the talking and I simply listen."

"When he next comes to town, inform me," I requested. "I will ask him myself."

"Would you dare?" she cried softly.

I laughed aloud, almost in irritation. "My dear lady, this is 1907, and a civilized community. Remember, we are not on the Spanish Main, a century back. Not only will I ask him, but he'll quickly tell me. I fear you've made a bugbear of Roger."

"Well," she sighed, "you haven't come to appreciate him yet. Even so cold a man as Abel fears him and wishes him away." This ended our interview and I escorted her home.

On my return to the hotel I was interested to behold groups of men running up and down the street, and to hear a confused clamor of excited voices. On meeting Sheriff McDoty under a friendly street-lamp I made bold to inquire, "What's the trouble, Sheriff?"

"Those footprints!" he cried, not pausing to note that it was a stranger who accosted him; and I believed I could detect a new ring of fear in his voice.

At the hotel I found my host standing on the sidewalk, peering anxiously up the street.

"What about the tracks, landlord?" I asked eagerly.

"They've come again to-night," he stammered over his shoulder. "They were found leading up to the bank, and the bank has been looted. What's worse, the cashier, who remained after hours to work on his books, has just been found, insensible from a blow."

Don't know who did it, or how much has been taken."

Stupefied, I sank to the step. I had entertained no suspicion that violence would follow in the path of the footprints. If Cousin Roger were at the bottom of the crime, his object must be something deeper than robbery, and it was evident he was to be reckoned with cautiously. As one in a trance I heard myself asking, "Is the cashier bald-headed?"

"Why, yes," cried the landlord impatiently. "But what of it?"

"His hair; had he had any, might have saved him from the blow," I faltered weakly.

It was fifteen minutes before I could get the Chief at his home over the long-distance. Almost before I had finished the details, and without putting a single query, he directed:

"Ascertain from Miss Vingt what papers relating to the estate were in the bank. Then notify me what ones are missing."

"One thing more," I announced, proudly, happy for once in not being anticipated: "the cashier is bald-headed, as is every other man the tracks have called on."

I turned crimson as I caught his low chuckle of amusement. Then he advised: "Quite clever of you, my dear Watson, to observe that. Stupendous! But now forget it, my dear boy; forget it."

CHAPTER III

THE LOST ALBUM

THE cashier could tell nothing. He knew only that he had finished his books and locked the cage preparatory to leaving by the side door. He remembered stepping through the doorway, and that was all. He could not recall having observed any one about the bank during the evening. When he came to, he was back in the cage, prostrate on the floor, where his assailant had dragged him. He had been struck with some blunt instrument over the head and on the doctor's orders took to his bed.

Evidently the criminal—for I did not believe more than one was concerned in the crime, although Sheriff McDoty stoutly insisted it was the work of an organized gang—had been frightened away, for the big vault was undisturbed. Some safety-deposit boxes had been wrenched open and rifled, however, while the empty cash-draw-

er had been torn loose and hurled into a corner. The contents of the deposit boxes littered the floor and had partially covered the insensible form of the wounded man.

Needless to say, the crime caused great excitement in the village; and for the first time, perhaps, the community as a whole saw a sinister significance in the red tracks. In the first five minutes I was on the street, I saw that Sheriff McDoty was a large figure in the situation, as he moved about importantly proclaiming his theory.

To add to the tensify of the moment, the morning also brought the discovery of a second robbery. Druggist Kimper's safe had been looted of two hundred dollars. The money belonged to the town, Kimper being the treasurer. As he admitted he must have forgotten to lock the safe, and as that receptacle had not been injured—thus bearing out his confession of negligence—he was allowed to make up the loss out of his own pocket.

I do not think he had expected his offer would be accepted when making it; but the citizens were in no mood to be lenient and he paid it over with a deep grimace. About the store, as at the bank, red tracks were found. Only—and perhaps I was alone in attaching any importance to this and possibly I was the only one to note it—no crimson footprints were to be found either in the bank or in the drug-store.

This second crime puzzled me hugely.

If Cousin Roger were guilty, what was his purpose? If the bank robbery was but a desperate move to get at the Vingt estate papers, why the burglary of the drug-store? The only solution to present itself was the presumption he had sought to evade suspicion of his real motive. But the risk seemed entirely out of proportion until I remembered the wounded cashier. His condition spoke eloquently of the villain's supreme disregard of all risks. Still, why had he left the telltale tracks?

I will frankly admit that the rapid sequence of events was quite perplexing. No sooner had I settled on one line of thought than something happened to upset me. The two burglaries at first caused me to doubt whether the Sheriff possessed any knowledge of the origin of the tracks. For even if he might be induced to remain quiescent while Roger was disturbing Miss Vingt's peace of mind, I could hardly believe he was party to a felony.

Thus, with my theories bolstered up only by thin air, I recalled the Chief's last orders and became active. So far as I could learn, practically nothing had been taken from the safety-deposit boxes. Either the intruder had scattered the papers about in a desperate search for some particular thing, or else he had created the disorder in a spirit of malicious mischief. Before the torn and confused papers had been collected and sorted out I called up Miss Vingt and urged her to meet me at once.

She responded promptly, and my first query was,

"Did you see Cousin Roger in town last night?"

"I did not, believe me. I did not."

And the distracted manner in which she twisted her fingers contrasted so oddly with the even level of her voice that I could only survey her with fresh interest.

"Did you see him at all yesterday?" I persisted.

"I am pleased to say I did not," she replied, and her deep sigh of relief was very genuine.



I THEN proceeded to examine her as to the contents of the estate's deposit box. She said it contained no will, as she and her cousin Abel had investigated and sealed up the papers immediately after their uncle's death. She knew there were many mortgages and bonds and other papers relating to the business affairs of the estate.

"Cousin Abel has a list of them all," she explained. "But there was no document that would be of any value whatever to a burglar; nothing but what we could get along without in settling up the estate. If the robber thinks we would buy back any of the papers, he is mistaken, as I wouldn't give a penny—no more than I would to recover the old photograph album."

"Why do you say robber?" I asked. "Sheriff McDoty says it's the work of a gang."

Her hands displayed much confusion, and she shifted her gaze for a few seconds before saying:

"I thought if there had been more than one or two, some attempt would have been made to open the vault. Undoubtedly the Sheriff knows best."

Her manner was a direct accusation of Cousin Roger; but I knew she would not

speak out against him, even to me. She had aged within the last twenty-four hours, and if her kinsman planned to shock her nerves by demonstrating that the tracks were more than a sign, he had succeeded admirably. To restore her poise in some degree I reverted to the picture album.

"Oh, it was merely an old heirloom of uncle's. He filed papers in it. We found it in the deposit box after his death and left it there."

"It contained photographs?" I continued carelessly.

"Quite a few," she returned. "Only, they were worthless, even to him."

"How do you know?"

She smiled for the first time during the interview, albeit faintly, and explained,

"Because he stamped all over them with a rubber stamp. You see, I would have made a good detective. I even remember one of the fingers was nicked."

"One of the fingers?" I murmured.

"Yes; a finger of the hand. The stamp was that of a hand pointing."

"Yet it was of value enough for him to keep all these years," I reminded.

"He was a man who liked the old order of things," she explained. "He wanted his every-day mind to pass along lines of least resistance. Once accustomed to filing papers in any receptacle, he would use it until it fell to pieces. Being absent-minded in business affairs, he would retain whatever he was used to. His thoughts were always on his investigations, and in all else he was mechanical. Even on his death-bed, when he could not speak, he went through the motion of using the stamp. His mind was doubtlessly on his life-work, but his hand could not forget the old trick of toying with the stamp."

My eyes snapped, although for the life of me I could not tell why I should feel elated. But in the back of my mind I had a longing for the album, even if it only served to arouse the Chief from his almost egotistical calm. I would obtain it from her and Abel, I decided, but wishing her to remain ignorant of my desires for the time being, I said lightly,

"So long as it doesn't contain a red footprint we may as well dismiss it."

This at once routed her ease and she again opened and closed her hands convulsively.

"Don't talk of them!" she begged.

"They have not visited you," I reminded.
 "No, but Cousin Abel has not been the same since they were found on his walk," she murmured, her smooth face in no way reflecting the emotion which was evidenced in her hands and eyes.



AFTER she left me I walked to the bank and joined the group of curious ones about the side door. Abel Vingt, fresh from a conference with the bank trustees, frosty of eye as usual, was just leaving.

"Anything missing, Mr. Vingt?" inquired the little druggist eagerly.

"The estate didn't lose so much as you did," replied the cripple in a brutal tone. "Only an old picture album gone. Any one finding it can have it."

His information caused my scalp to feel cold with disappointment. I had been on the brink of a discovery, I assured myself, and only to be balked. I regretted I was not in position to sue for Abel's confidence and discuss the half-framed theory now gradually filling my mind. In the meanwhile he had wheeled his machine at the crowd, full tilt, without waiting for a passageway, but as he drew abreast me he stopped short and inquired,

"Picked up any bargains yet?"

I met his hard eyes cheerily and even rested a hand on the rubber-tired wheel, and returned,

"Not yet. I'm only interested in your estate, you know. Guess I shall have to wait till your brother comes to town. I suppose he has a right to give options on his undivided one-third of the realty."

"Brother Roger can drop dead if he wants to!" he whispered, bending close to me.

And with this amiable sentiment he shot his machine ahead, narrowly missing my fingers as he did so. Had I not jumped back I believe they would have been severed.

I began to dislike him more than I did Roger, be the latter a burglar or what he might.

But the picture album was waiting to be reported to the Chief, and I lost no more time in informing him of its disappearance. His reply to my somewhat lengthy remarks was characteristic.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that the druggist was robbed. The album should be found at once. It's undesirable that heirlooms

should be tossed about among strangers."

If Central listened to these few words she was puzzled. But to me his meaning was plain. He never wasted words in advice. After telling, or rather hinting, that I should do a thing, he would offer no suggestion as to how I should proceed; nor would he, if I went about my task in the wrong way, take any particular pains to correct me.

In fact, even as I hung up the receiver, I recalled several instances when he had watched my useless efforts with whimsical indifference to all errors. But as the time ripened for results he had quietly stepped in and solved the problem himself. Now I understood he looked to me to locate the album; for what reason I had but a vague idea. I also knew that, should I fail at the last hour, he would take the situation in hand himself.

I would not infer he always allowed me to work in the dark. But he was along in years and his time was precious; he had often explained it was more economical to do things first-hand than to waste words in telling me how to proceed when he could have no absolute assurance of my success. Had I asked him how to go about finding the missing book, I knew he would have smiled patiently and said,

"Never mind. It's not material."

This gentle rebuke was ever in my ears, and I never recall the days of my apprenticeship without reddening. I filled an important desk in Mr. Butterworth's office, yet I always had before my mind's eye many unwon laurels. For a man who never used the spur, he obtained, I suppose, more results from employees than any other office head in all Broadway.



SO I now had but one desire—to find the book. If Cousin Roger were the offender, I must look for it in the places he frequented. Until I learned his city address I must confine my efforts to his Swackton house. This was a large, lonely mansion on the edge of the village, belonging to the Vingt estate, and at one time utilized by the founder of the Vingt fortunes as a workshop and laboratory. Roger preferred it to the hotel, owing to its proximity to the railroad station. Abel approved of his stopping anywhere so long as the village was between them. As this building was the only defi-

nite point in my mental ken, I forthwith decided to pay it a visit.

The house itself was extremely odd in structure. Standing on a slight elevation, it was intended from the start as a place where prying eyes could discover nothing. So far as seclusion went, it was an ideal workshop. But the elements, in breaking away the rear foundation, had caused the building to tip back a bit. This dilapidation, coupled with its wide double doors, and two windows at the height of the second story in front, gave the impression of a gigantic face, yawning.

When the doors were open and the window-shades were half drawn, the simile was more pronounced. And being unusually wide and surmounted by a dome-like roof, I could only think of the big-headed Vingt family when gazing at it. This last fancy of mine was a bit far-fetched, perhaps, as I had never seen a Vingt in the midst of a sleepy yawn, with eyes half closed.

The nature of my errand demanded Roger's absence, as I had determined to play his own game and turn burglar. If he were there I would yet go, even if I met the whole Vingt family. After making this resolution I was thrown into a state approaching chagrin by a message from Roger Vingt himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE THAT YAWNED

I HAD just finished the evening meal when the landlord called me to the telephone. I expected to hear either my chief or Miss Vingt when I picked up the receiver. Imagine my surprise when a smooth and delightfully pleasant voice, modulated to almost musical tones, yet very masculine, called me by name, and said,

"I understand from my brother, Abel Vingt, that you are interested in Swackton realty and have expressed an inclination to meet me in regard to purchasing my prospective share of the Vingt estate. Am I correct?"

"This is Mr. Roger Vingt?" I countered, speaking calmly only by something of an effort and instinctively sparring for time.

"Pardon me; yes. I am Roger Vingt," returned his suave voice.

"Then I should like to see you very

much," I said in assumed heartiness, for I was disgruntled at his presence in the Laboratory House. "Where and when may I?"

"You could call this evening," he cordially suggested. "Any one will tell you where the Laboratory House is. As I take the evening train to the city, I can't give you much time to-night; but it will suffice to make a more definite and leisurely appointment, either here or in town."

I thanked him as warmly as I could and then consulted my watch. If he were to leave on the evening train I must needs hasten, as it already was near the hour. Seizing my cane I hurried forth, putting my best leg forward.

As I neared the outskirts of the town I fell to wondering at Roger's hardihood in returning to the village so soon after his felonious exploit, especially since he seemed to hold himself aloof instead of playing the limit and boldly meeting all men. From what I had learned of him I could not conceive of his taking any step without a definite motive. What was his purpose? Whom was he moving against? Cowardice whispered "you," but second thought would not admit of this fell suspicion.

He had called me up openly on a public telephone and his brother knew of my desire to meet with him. Besides, I had nothing on which to base a belief that he considered me as aught but a real-estate agent. Abel might be anxious for us to come together in the hope that my mythical land company might advance moneys, or take some steps to bring about Roger's departure.

Unconsciously I had paused in pursuing this tangled thread of thought, and now, confident I had arrived at the only logical conclusion, I lighted a cigar and resumed my steps. But in the dying flicker of the discarded match I detected a dark smudge on the plank sidewalk. I nervously struck another match and made more minute observations. At my feet and extending beyond the feeble arc cast by my light, I beheld the trail of the red-hoofed! I'll confess I felt a bit of a chill as I remembered the act of violence that marked the last appearance of the tracks. Yet the man was waiting for me, and, shaking off my timidity, I accelerated my pace.

Despite my haste, however, I occasionally struck light after light, and behold, the dark footprints were ever before me! As

I advanced the realization swept home—they were leading me to the house that yawned! I was so positive in this conclusion that I hardly bothered to look at the walk as I passed through the gate.

 THE front doors were open. In the moonlight the first impression returned, tenfold. The house was yawning. As I ceremoniously rapped on the stout panels with my light stick I saw what seemed to be a shadow, and it detached itself, I fancied, and vanished around the corner. Despite my momentary weakness I would not retreat. I could see how composedly the Chief would take the last step, had he been there in my stead. So I rapped more loudly; and, receiving no reply, I stumbled into the dark hallway and struck a light.

As I did so a locomotive whistled down at the station. Either Cousin Roger was a magnificent liar, or else he was on his way across the narrow field to catch the train. Providing the something I saw dodging about the corner were he, he would yet have time to make the station if he hurried. Still it did not impress me as being wholesome to find the doors open; nor did it promise any discovery of the picture album. I began to regret my errand; for undoubtedly by now the missing book was safely concealed in New York.

At this point, as I was about to give up my quest without attempting a search of the house, my perturbation was augmented by discovering that the tracks had, like myself, invaded the hallway. They even passed beyond where I was standing. Obviously I had traced them home to their lair. This decided me to go farther in the adventure; for in sudden recklessness I longed to find the end of the trail. Heretofore, no one had been able, in following the trail, to find any point of entrance to, or exit from, the village. The tracks simply began and left off in the streets.

Providing myself with another match, I passed the length of the hall. Just as I was becoming buoyant in my courage I was cast back into irresolution by hearing on my left what sounded like a groan! I paused uncertain for several seconds. Either it was done to frighten me, or else some one was in distress and needed assistance. This left me but one course to pursue: I must proceed. Now I had come to my last

match, and guarding it jealously, I threw open the door and stepped in.

The shiver of fear I experienced and the low cry I uttered came near extinguishing my last torch. For I found myself in a room of eyes. On every hand fierce orbs glared at me with all the baleful intensity of the cat family, as if resenting my intrusion. The walls were literally built of them. In my foolish pusillanimity I staggered back and might have fled had not one hand, thrown out mechanically, come in contact with the wall.

The eyes were cold and hard, like glass, and in a flash I recalled hearing Miss Vingt tell of her uncle's experiment in lenses. He had endeavored to discover a process whereby the wearer of his spectacles, or eyeglasses, could see clearly in the darkness. I laughed hysterically in a revulsion of feeling and reached out a hand and plucked one of the contrivances from its fastening. Of course it was but a discarded sample of the investigator's art.

Then my mind reverted to my errand as a repetition of the groaning led me to make out the form of a man huddled on the floor. As I did so the fire died from the match, and I was left with only a rag of moonlight, fluttering high up through one window, to guide my steps.

 HOWEVER, I needed no light in gaining the prostrate figure. As it proved to be quite limp, I dragged it from the glittering ken of the upper tier of eyes out into the hall, thence to the front door.

"Who are you? What are you and what is the matter? You can't be Roger Vingt!" I cried, finding immense moral support in my own voice.

"Take me away! take me away!" moaned the man, now weaving to and fro like one drunken as I hauled him to his feet.

"Great Scott! The druggist!" I cried, at last recognizing the little man. "What's happened? Did you follow the tracks here?"

"Yes! yes!" he shuddered. "But not so loud. Help me home. I'm—I'm undone!"

"Are you injured? Have you been wounded?" I asked anxiously, as I recalled the cashier.

"No! no! I guess not," he moaned. "But the eyes unnerved me. I had forgotten about them. Help me home!"

"Brace up," I soothed, wondering at his pluck in going on such an excursion alone. "They gave me quite a start, too. Of course I'll take you home. I came to meet Mr. Roger Vingt, but arrived too late and my visit is without profit. Come, brace up."

In broken tones he told me, as we made for the village, that he could not tell what prompted him to follow the tracks, once he had discovered them. He believed, he said, it was a desire to outdo the Sheriff by running down the maker of the trail. He insisted he had felt no radical fear until he entered the room of eyes. When the gleam of the innumerable orbs was focused on him he failed to remember the deceased Vingt's experiments and consequently collapsed.

"How long were you there before I arrived?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," he shivered. "It seemed ages, but was only a few minutes, I suppose."

"Did you see Roger Vingt?" I continued.

"No; if I had, I wouldn't have given away. I guess he'd left for the city. When I found the tracks leading to his house, I didn't know but what he was to be assaulted, as was the cashier. I wanted to warn him."

"One more question. Did you find the doors open?"

"No; closed. But not locked."

HAN HOUR after depositing him at his door in a very shaky condition, two bits of intelligence served to reduce me to a confused state of mind. The first was Sheriff McDoty's announcement to the group on the hotel veranda that the village night-watchman had just discovered a trail of the mysterious tracks leading not only to the Laboratory House, but from it. I could swear there was no return trail when the druggist and I quit the premises.

"Where did they lead to?" I inquired.

"Almost to Kimper's home," he returned shortly, as if resenting a query from a stranger.

It was obvious, I told myself, that Roger Vingt had not gone to the city, but had dogged me and Kimper to the village.

Within five minutes item number two came in and added to my bewilderment. It was a telephone message from Mr. Butterworth, in the course of which he said he had

just been called up on the telephone by some one representing himself to be Roger Vingt.

"He said he was talking from the Flax Iron Building and wanted to know if it would be of any use to call on me in person and ask me to take a retainer and appear for him in the settlement of the Vingt estate," detailed the Chief. "I told him I could not appear for him."

This demanded one of two theories: either Roger took the train and was not the maker of the tracks, which had followed me, and was not the cashier's assailant, or else he had telephoned a falsehood from Swackton, possibly in the intention of perfecting an alibi in event he was connected with the fresh trail, or in event the maker of those tracks had laid me low.

CHAPTER V

TALKS WITH THREE

THE situation was peculiar. The village life moved on in its placid rut undisturbed, to be sure, yet not jolted out of its drowsy calm, by the bank and drug store burglaries. Sheriff McDoty talked of yeggmen, and from some source obtained a slender vocabulary of thieves' jargon and impressed his listeners mightily with expressions such as "gay cats," "stick-up" men, and the like. Even if I had possessed no knowledge whatever of Roger's wiles I could not have leaned to this theory, as tramp burglars seldom indulge in any freakish self-advertising and usually depart once a crime is committed.

Kimper, also, held out against the Sheriff's conclusions. Of course, having read Roger's manuscript, he saw some significance in the tracks. I could not, in fact, reconcile his knowledge of the manuscript with his statement that he had followed the trail to the Laboratory House in order to warn Roger. I knew he had a deeper purpose—possibly a belief he could place the bank burglary on the right man and thus steal the Sheriff's thunder.

Whatever may have been his motive—or his real belief after being followed home—it all left him a changed man. His teeth seemed ready to chatter when a customer casually asked for a soda. His physical make-up likewise underwent a metamorphosis. From being a slight-framed man he

seemed to shrink to even frailer proportions and to put on years, while his eyes shone with a wild, haunted look. I could see, however, he viewed me as his rescuer and he seemed to derive comfort in my company.

The Sheriff, to the contrary, did not appear to care for my presence. If I made any observation in his hearing he ignored it. If I asked him a question he answered briefly and never encouraged me to continue. This aversion caused me to recanvass my first, half-formed theories. If he were not in the pay of Roger, what was the import of his ridiculous talk about yeggmen? Or could it, after all, be a subterfuge to mislead the villagers?

As the Chief would say, the plot was becoming beautifully tangled. While the community as a whole entertained no particular speculation as to the burglaries, I could name, I knew, Miss Vingt and her cousin Abel as being practically assured, like myself, of the identity of the criminal. Crediting the druggist with even a modicum of brains, he, too, must associate the red manuscript with the doer of the heinous deed.

As to the Sheriff, I could but alternate as to his status. Now I was positive he was insincere in his declarations; again, I could not believe him guilty of radical wrongdoing. Unless he was in Roger's pay he knew nothing. For of those who had read or knew about the red manuscript, not one, so far as I could learn, had breathed a word. This restraint, I decided, was occasioned by fear—fear of Roger.

Everything ended at the beginning, and all my reasoning was in a circle.

"You like—that is—Roger Vingt always impressed you favorably?" I inquired of Kimper, while drinking a morning soda.

"Why, to be honest, sir, I never give him much thought," he returned. "I haven't seen but little of him, and I've never stopped to think much about him. But he's free with his money, has a pleasant way and is never disagreeable. Now Abel—well, Abel is a little close; a little close. I've known him all my life. To be candid, sir, he ain't the most cheerful body in the world. Kind of an odd family. Yet Roger is the pleasantest one of the lot."

"I've heard Roger is quite companionable," I remarked.

"Much more so than any other Vingt I ever saw, and I knew their old uncle," read-

ily confirmed the druggist. "He has a light-hearted way, even with strangers. And he laughs a good deal, which I always admire in a man. I guess he gets his free manners from traveling. Just what little I've seen of him has taught me more about foreign countries than all the rest of the village combined could."

"He ought to be able to write a book," I declared enthusiastically.

Kimper paused in wiping a glass and let the towel fall to the floor. When he straightened, his hands seemed a trifle unsteady, but he calmly returned:

"Guess he never thought of writing anything. Guess he's too easy-going, or lazy."

As I knew he had at least read one of Roger's efforts, I smiled inwardly. Either he was very loyal to, or in fear of, some one. Inclined to jar him out of his aplomb a bit, I said, "Wonder when and where the red tracks will next appear."

His eyes were almost pathetic as he leaned against the counter and in a poorly controlled voice cried, "I hope they'll never come again. I—I should prefer not to talk of them, sir. I've just discovered my nerves are in bad shape."

"I don't believe they'll bother you again," I soothed. "You've paid toll once."

"I hope so," he groaned, turning from me. "I've lost two hundred by them; what's worse, there's poor Jellyby, the cashier, laid up with a cracked skull. It's a wonder it wasn't murder. And to think of such things happening in quiet Swackton! Sometimes I think it's the work of a crazy man."

"We've seen the last of them," I assured, and I believed we had.

For unless, as Kimper suggested, they were the result of an insane prank, Cousin Roger was astute enough to appreciate that their days of usefulness were past.

"Yet they followed us last night," he reminded in a shrill whisper, his eyes rolling uneasily.

Confound the man! Why didn't he drop the subject, after once declaring it was disquieting? Had I mistaken his intellectual capacity and did he fail to remember the red manuscript? It could not be, for I had gone out of my way to bring it to his memory by observing that Roger should write a book.

 WEARY of the attempt to gather any inspiration from his contradictory demeanor I left him, determined to pay an open visit to Miss Vingt. As Abel now knew I sought appointments with his brother, and as I also had called on him, I could see no virtue in further concealment.

I found her much wrought up over last night's new trail. Her first words were an eager inquiry whether it would not be better for her to waive all rights and refuse to act as administratrix.

The Chief often said it was more difficult to win a verdict for one woman than for a dozen men.

"Would your cousin Abel consent?" I asked.

"No," she admitted, "he would not. When I suggested it this morning he told me he would not act with his brother under any consideration, and added that he would not permit Roger to act alone. You see, he does not trust Roger, and is anxious, I believe, for him to be gone."

"Out of your own mouth it is evident Roger is trying to frighten you into allowing him more than his rightful share of the estate. It is obvious he does not wish to await the court's slow action, but seeks a settlement with you and Abel at once. As I understand it, my employer was retained for the very purpose of thwarting any of Roger's greedy schemes. Now, when it is patent his little game is working, you are eager to play into his hands and do what he illegally seeks to effect."

"I'd be willing to make considerable of a sacrifice to be rid of him," she insisted.

"You don't know Mr. Butterworth," I smiled coldly. "Now that he has taken the case he will save you from yourself. No compromise with Cousin Roger. If you wished to make him a present of your share of the estate you should have acted before calling us in. No, Miss Vingt, Roger must be choked off with only a third."

"What if I decide I don't need your services longer?" she asked.

"We would still keep Roger from any unjust participation in the estate," I replied promptly.

She sat and mused in stolid silence for about a minute. Then she sighed and said,

"Very well; let it go on, then."

After squelching this inclination of hers

to surrender I proceeded to ask more definitely about the missing picture album.

"I can tell you no more than I have," her singsong discouraged. "Cousin Abel and I examined the papers after you 'phoned me yesterday, and found only the book is missing. I believe the robbers in their haste thought they had some important package of papers."

"You now think there was more than one robber?" I asked.

"You said the Sheriff says the burglary was the work of a band," she reminded in a low voice. Then, with her hands performing the old trick of distraction, she begged, "Don't talk any more about it. I am trying to forget. I mustn't think of it."

 HER mood was such that a further interview was useless, and after repeating my assurance that Mr. Butterworth would conserve all her rights, I left her. As I turned the street corner I almost tumbled over Abel, who was stationary in his machine. His usually blank face betrayed, in my estimation, a touch of anger. He was studying a metropolitan paper that circulated in Swackton.

"Looking up the stock-market?" I quizzed, to attract his attention.

He raised his big head slowly and eyed me in silence for several seconds. I expected some brusque reply and was inwardly surprised to find him in an almost amiable spirit so far as I was concerned. His sullen mien was explained when he spoke.

"See that," he rumbled, tapping the newspaper. "It's what I call gall."

My eyes followed his invitation and I read:

WANTED—Picture album missing from Vingt safety-deposit box. Liberal reward and no questions asked. Inquire Laboratory House, Swackton, between 9 and 10, evening of to-day.

R. V.

"He attaches more importance to the stolen album than you do," I observed.

"—his nerve!" he growled. "Any one would think he is the only one having a say in settling the estate. If it had been the family record I wouldn't have wondered at this move quite so much. Had that been filched—but, pardon me; I forgot I was addressing almost a stranger."

And he moved the levers to pass me.

But I did not want to lose him so quick-

ly. Here was a man who knew the true significance of the red tracks. He also knew the identity of the bank burglar. Of course he knew his brother already possessed the book. Yet in commenting on the advertisement he seemed to be aroused only at Roger's presumption in taking the initiative.

"Do you believe there is any chance of his having to pay the reward?" I asked, in what was intended for a quizzical tone.

Again that inscrutable stare, and finally he barked, "No!"

"Yet he shows a disposition to conserve all interests," I mused.

"Bah!" he sneered, speaking more freely; "as if we needed any help from that vagabond! Away and missing through all the years, but in at the death. Ha! ha!"—and there was something ponderously venomous in his laugh—"sometimes I wonder if Brother Roger has ever been in at other deaths—deaths where but little formality was observed!"

"You called him a pirate on one occasion," I smiled, yet with the air of treating it all as an inconsequential family wrangle.

"And I called him a pirate yesterday when he told me he was intending to give you an audience," he hissed. "Much good the interview did you, I trust."

"No good," I cheerfully informed. "He had to catch the evening train and, as I was a bit late, I missed him. And pardon, you say he told you. He said you informed him of my desire."

"Don't try to do tricks with words," he snarled. "He'll be sending for you again. Only, be sure the titles are clear to anything you may take an option on."

"I don't know that I shall try to get any options," I said, speaking slowly. "You see, my firm, while interested in realty, does quite a business in settling up estates. I have just called on your cousin, and we shall probably represent her when the Vingt estate reaches surrogate's court."

He displayed no surprise so far as I could see, nor would it have been like him to do so; but I thought he gazed at me with new interest in his big gray eyes.

"I hope she gets her money's worth," he finally said. "I have but little use for lawyers, myself. Did you really desire to buy real estate when you called on me?"

"As I said at the time, I was really interested in that portion of Swackton realty

embraced in the Vingt estate," I dodged.

"You seem to have been devilish mysterious," he observed, with a click of his strong jaws.

"Well, the general situation was slightly out of plumb," I defended. "Several things have happened since I first came to town. Red tracks, you know, and even burglaries and violence."

"Yes?" And he waited as if for me to continue.

"And I was wondering just now," I suddenly shifted, "if your brother could learn who the robbers were, if he should advertise."

"I don't believe he could ascertain much by advertising," was the careful reply. "In fact, I don't believe in publicity. Do you? It doesn't do an individual, or a family, any good."

"You'd rather fight a duel on the quiet than to call in a policeman?" I bantered.

He pursed his lips gravely and nodded his head. Then he said,

"Yes; keep your skeletons in your own closet!"

"I was proceeding on that theory when I arrived *sub rosa*," I laughed.

"Your motive was very pure and praiseworthy," he growled. "Now that you seem to be a discreet young man, intent on your fee and not given to foolishly serving the public in a wholesale manner, may I ask why you say 'robbers' in speaking of the burglaries?"

The directness of it flustered me, and perhaps I showed it. I had just left his non-committal cousin and had come to decide he wished to balk his brother in private, or in a duel, and here he was, of his own accord, beating back to my side of the game and inviting my opinion.

"Do you think there was only one man concerned in the affair?" I asked lamely.

"Only one," he mumbled. "And that's all we'll say about it."

"Just tell me this," I begged eagerly: "Is Sheriff McDoty a fool?"

He grinned savagely, and then replied, "He is no fool, but he is very foolish."

I could see he entertained the thought that had beset me in the first instance. McDoty was in some way tangled up with Roger's doings.

"By the way," I informed carelessly, as he was about to wheel on, "did you know that those confounded red tracks vis-

ited the Laboratory House last night?"

He pulled up long enough to respond, "Yes, I heard about them. Maybe Brother Roger will advertise in regard to their appearance." And his face was distorted as he looked back over his shoulder. Then he advised, "Be careful, and don't get mixed up in them."

CHAPTER VI

I ANSWER AN ADVERTISEMENT

AFTER leaving him I rapidly evolved a plan. My Chief had often railed at me in a good-natured manner for lacking in initiative, or, when I had laid out a praiseworthy course of action, for coming to him for sanction instead of going ahead. Now I had been in Swackton for several days and had not once met the one man whom I considered to be the key-note of various unusual happenings. In fact, beyond arriving too late at an interview of his own appointing I had not endeavored to meet him.

Manifestly I had been negligent in not attacking the source of the several mysteries instead of frittering away my time and energy in idle conjecture and in studying merely the results of Roger's activity. Therefore I quickly decided to take advantage of his presence in the village and pay him a visit. I would disclaim any knowledge of the picture album and pretend I was only eager to mix in his affairs as a real-estate dealer; for I did not apprehend that Abel would apprise him of my true capacity. I was now glad I had, at least, the half confidence of the cripple. He knew enough to jail Roger, had he been willing to fight him in the open and provided he could establish his proofs. I believed Miss Marilla was equally as suspicious.

As I dwelt on my scheme during the supper hour I became highly enthusiastic. I could not foresee how the venture would profit me, except as I might study Roger face to face. I could not hope for an opportunity to search the premises for the book; nor had I much confidence it was in Swackton. But I would meet the man; that was the idea. And I did not doubt that we should have a rare interview.

The very suggestion of a duel with this dangerous, merry-mannered adventurer was like wine to me. Quiet, unsuspecting Swackton for the stage-setting; a million

dollars for the stake, and Abel and Miss Vingt and Kimper, and, yes, possibly the Sheriff, for the onlookers. I chuckled aloud as I wondered whether the village would ever wake up to the realization that so stiff a combat had been waged.

Next I was obsessed by the fear I might be forestalled by a message from Roger asking me to come to-morrow and thus destroying the night's excuse; or designating to-night, and thus robbing me of all credit of playing off my own bat. To evade this possibility I walked up to the drug-store and killed the intervening time. At a few minutes of the appointed hour I started for the Laboratory House.

Unlike the night before, there was no moon and the Midsummer darkness was very thick. But I preferred this condition, and as I neared the house I was vaguely relieved to find the clouds had precluded any grotesque fancies. The building was only a dark blur, hardly discernible in its heavy setting of trees.



I MUST confess my heart thumped a bit as I tiptoed up the walk. I had exchanged my light stick for a rough, bludgeon-like cane, and grasping this the more firmly, I played a loud rat-a-tat on the closed doors. Almost instantly a low voice asked,

"Who is it?"

The simple and natural query, coming as it did so closely on my summons, especially when I believed my approach had been noiseless, caused me to start spasmodically. But in a smothered tone, for I was not sure I could control my reply, I gave my name and business.

"How did you know I was in town?" was the next interrogation, as the door swung open, revealing nothing but blackness.

"I saw your ad," I honestly replied, stepping in, yet unable to make out any human form.

"Follow me," was the invitation, softly spoken; and, feeling my steps with the cane, I blundered the length of the hall until a thread of light shone under a door.

My conductor swung this open smartly, and turning, saluted,

"Good boy, Jethuel."

With distended eyes I found myself facing the Chief, Ezra Stackpole Butterworth!

"You here!" I gasped, as he sank into a chair and motioned me to another.

"It would seem so," he assured gently, running one long, thin hand through his white hair with as much composure as though he had been in his own home.

"Alone?"

"Alone; until you arrived."

"Then for once we have followed the same inclination and I have thought your thoughts," I cried, proud even in my amazement.

"My dear boy, I wrote the ad," he quietly informed me.

"Then whom did you expect?" I muttered, now entirely bewildered.

"If any one, either Roger or Abel Vingt."

"And what could you profit when you confess you wrote the advertisement?" I blurted, believing I had found a weak spot in his plan, whatever it might be.

"I do not intend to confess," he explained in his habitual, mild tone. "I can truthfully say I read the ad, and now I call to see how much it is worth to the estate to get back the book."

"But why do all this?" I persisted.

"What object can you have? You could call on Roger Vingt any day he is in town, with a dozen errands to explain your coming."

"But I do not care to see him," he said, smiling indulgently. "I desired to be here alone. If he were in the city I figured he would not see the ad. If he did see it, or had he been here to-night, why, I had my excuse for intruding, although my real object then would have been defeated. Yet I was prepared with a graceful retreat. If he should come now I can explain I presumed on the invitation of his ad, and had entered to rest my old bones until he returned. In short, there is nothing irregular about my being here to-night. But I do not believe he has observed the ad, else he would have been here to see what it all means."

"His brother Abel noticed it," I informed.

"But you have said they have little in common. Should he come, we shall have quite a party."

"I don't think he'll come," I said. "He declares the book is of no value, although he is provoked to think Roger has advertised for it."

"Huh!"

"So to all intents and purposes you are alone in the house and I shall be pleased to observe how you employ your opportunity."

"You can hardly enter into that delectation," he said, holding up a flat package.

"Which is?" I cried, trembling with excitement.

"The stolen picture album," he replied gravely. Then he added, "Did you ever read Poe's story of the purloined letter? Well, it illustrates an ancient truth that in concealing anything success is often engendered and the searchers baffled by leaving it out almost openly. This book I found in the kitchen, under a cook-book of exactly the same size. The two looked like one volume; but I happened to be curious to know what interest a bird of passage, who dines in the city and who is about to share in an immense estate, could have in cookery; and I picked it up."

"If Roger should come now?" I worried, uneasy at the open display of the stolen property.

"I should present him with it."

"And thus confess to a burglary, as well as rendering nil all your efforts," I murmured.

"I don't believe he would ask any questions," slowly returned the Chief, resting his clean-shaven chin on his interlaced fingers. "He certainly would deny it was found in this house."

"He'd know you were evading."

"All men are liars, my boy, and thereby fulfil a Biblical statement of fact," he sighed, rising carefully. "But as I have no purchaser I may as well catch the train to town."



TO THINK that he, an old man, infirm and almost feeble, except as to his extraordinary mental powers, could take a few hours off and achieve what I had not been able to do in days of scheming, covered me with confusion. As we reached the outer door and he paused to adjust his coat against the night air I was thoroughly humble.

"You think we have an unusual case, sir?" I inquired meekly.

"Quite interesting, Jethuel," he conceded, clapping me on the shoulder. "And for a child you do nicely. I'll admit I was almost sorry after giving you discretionary powers as to the matter of the injunction."

Miss Vingt had written me quite fully about it, and I was a bit interested. I yet believe the injunction could have been obtained and made permanent in any court of equity had some one else, who is interested in the estate—say, her crippled cousin—sought it in her behalf. However, as the situation now stands, especially since the delectable red tracks have walked in, I have great hopes—great hopes.”

Even as he finished—we had just reached the gate—I thought I heard a faint whirring sound. But before I could speak he suddenly pulled me behind the iron grillwork of the fence and then urged me along the walk at a rapid pace.

“What is it?” I whispered as we paused under a street-lamp.

“That’s what I’m curious to ascertain,” he murmured. “I felt something ting against my side. Ah! here we have it. A common darning-needle, conveniently threaded, stuck fast in the cover of the album as I carried it under my arm! Waste not, want not. See a pin, pick it up, eh? We’ll save it.”

And before my uncomprehending eyes he gingerly plucked a long darning-needle from the parcel and carefully ensconced it in a pocket-book.

“One thing I don’t believe you noticed,” he observed, as I was about to leave him at the station; and in the light of the switch lamp I could see he was smiling, as if amused.

“I guess I didn’t,” I admitted, wondering what was to come next.

“Well, the red tracks you saw in the hall of the Laboratory House last night had been carefully eliminated when I got there this evening!”

CHAPTER VII

THE THREADED NEEDLES

CONSISTENT with his custom, Mr. Butterworth neglected to give me any instructions when we parted at the station; and consequently I awoke next morning with but a vague idea as to what my course of action was to be. After dawdling over my breakfast without hitting on any settled plan, I wandered aimlessly to the drug-store.

All about me the villagers were pursuing their homely little destinies, as unmindful

of the drama being enacted in their midst as they were of the city’s grind an hour away. The import of the bank burglary and the needle-throwing came warmly into my mind as I fell to contrasting my recent experiences with the vacuous monotony of all about me. Kimper, I was decided, was an exception to Swackton’s lethargy. He possessed a guilty knowledge, resulting from his perusal of the obnoxious manuscript, and, although remaining silent, his clean conscience was wrenching him.

As I had expected, I found him dejected in manner and seemingly suffering from physical indisposition. His former perturbed eagerness was now changed to apathy. His eyes were dull in expression and the hand that set out my ginger-ale moved as if wearied.

While studying him and meditating the advisability of breaking through his abstraction, my landlord puffed through the doorway and handed me a telegram. Before opening it I was confident the Chief had realized my lack of purpose and was now giving some direction to my befogged thoughts. Therefore I was not surprised to read the one word, “Come.” There was no name attached. But here was a definite step I could take with a will, and the subdued side of my nature cried out hungrily for Broadway. A glance at the local timetable told me I might catch an express on a narrow margin, and, leaving my glass untasted, I sprinted for the station.



AN HOUR later I was in a new world, surrounded by the harmonious roar of Broadway. The Chief was in his private office awaiting me, the stenographer said. On entering I found him engaged in the feminine trick of threading a needle; he merely bowed his head in return to my salutation.

“What are you sewing?” I jocosely inquired.

“That,” he returned, nodding toward the opposite wall.

I could see only a small square of cardboard, pinned about waist-high.

“I do it like this,” he explained, and wheeling sprightly he hurled the needle, which, to my surprise, sped with great swiftness and stuck nearly in the center of the target and remained there. “I’ve been practising for nearly an hour,” he continued, cocking his head in approval of

the shot. It seemed truly marvelous. "I see," I cried; "you are preparing to meet last night's needle-thrower on his own ground."

"God forbid!" he exclaimed with some heat, and his clean-shaven jaw squared. "You'll observe I have here various sizes of needles, all containing a foot or so of common thread. I throw them like this—and this—and this—" and each word was punctuated by a swift movement of his arm, until the target looked like my lady's work-basket.

"Of course," he concluded, "the lighter the needle the longer the tail must be to steady it. For instance: in throwing this fine cambric needle, I use a long thread and more muscle; and not only is it harder to aim, but the force of impact is less than any of the others. Ah! just on the edge of the card. Suppose you try it."

I readily demonstrated that after a few trials I could pierce the target at almost every cast, even when standing at the opposite wall.

"The darn-needle makes the easiest shot," I observed. "And a man would make an easy target. Hello! last night's needle, eh? Let's see how that throws."

And I was reaching for a large needle on the top of his desk when he caught my arm and violently pulled me away.

"Don't touch it!" he cried. "One prick from its point and you are a dead man! Yes, poison. The chemist said he would allow ten minutes of life before death ensues!"

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "Are we in so desperate a game as that?"

"It would seem so," he murmured.

"And with two of these things we both might have been destroyed," I shuddered, feeling weak at the knees for a few seconds.

"One was enough, if it worked," he explained. "Can't you see, if it hadn't been for the book you would have been in the unpleasant predicament of a stranger found by the dead body of another stranger? How would you satisfy the authorities as to your business in prowling around another man's house? And how would you account for my body? Of course, in time you could prove who you were, who I had been, and you might ultimately go free.

"But in the interim you would be placed in confinement and possibly suspected of assaulting the bank cashier. By the time you were set at liberty several important

matters would have been fully settled, among them the Vingt estate; and like *Othello*, you would awake to find your occupation gone. Yes, I admire the forbearance of our friend in throwing but one dart."

"It's devilish!" I cried.

"Smacks of pirates, eh?" he smiled. "Possibly Roger saw the ad, after all, eh?"

"We know he did," I growled, for I could not take such an offense as being merely a part of the game. "I guess Miss Vingt's half-formed fears are well founded."

Mr. Butterworth did not seem to hear me, and sat silent for fully a minute, staring at the needle-filled target, his chin resting on his finger-tips. From long observation I knew his thoughts had strayed.

Then he raised his head and suddenly said, "I want to see Kimper, the druggist. Tell him if he will come to me to-morrow I believe I can aid him to recover the money stolen from his safe."

My eyes opened very wide at this, but I waited in vain for him to elucidate his reasons for extending such a hope. Then I smiled at the simplicity of it all. Abel and Miss Vingt would not implicate Roger in a criminal charge. Family pride was the barrier. As Abel had said, it must be a duel, and no policemen. But Kimper might be induced to speak, providing he could recover his two hundred dollars. Of course we could not know whether or not he possessed more than a suspicion, based on his reading the manuscript. Then in a more subtle vein I recalled his trip to the Laboratory House, and knew I had fathomed the Chief's thought.

"In other words," I said quietly, "when Kimper went to call on Cousin Roger, intent also on following the red tracks, he knew just who was ahead of him and intended to make use of his knowledge in the fashion of a threat. Either Roger must make up his two hundred dollars, or he intended to divulge the identity of the trail-maker."

"Good! my dear boy; exceedingly clever," cried the Chief. Then he suggested, "But why not go a step further and deduce he has received his money, and consequently has remained silent?"

"That's but the finale of my reasoning," I defended. "I had not finished."

"Well, give him my message, and we'll see what we shall see."

 HIS gratification over my quick conclusions was obvious; nor, to be truthful, was I dissatisfied with myself. I only regretted I had not seen a light without being led to it. To have suggested this line of campaign on my own initiative would have been a great victory. But, there! he was the Chief because he always thought first.

"What if he doesn't come?" I inquired.

"It's immaterial in that event," he returned. "His failure to appear will settle one point conclusively."

"That he has already received his money," I added. "Is that all?"

"All on that topic, Jethuel," he assured. Then reaching behind him he produced a thin book, old-fashioned in binding and cover, and inscribed, "Picture Album." Handing it to me, he inquired, "Do you ever enjoy looking at old photographs?"

I received it mechanically and said nothing as I turned the leaves. Each picture had been defaced by the imprint of a hand, the index finger pointing. "What am I to do with this?" I asked bluntly.

"You are to take it to Swackton and hand it to Abel Vingt."

"And not to his brother?"

"I believe I mentioned Abel."

"Very well," I muttered; "I'll ask no questions, then I won't be snubbed."

"My dear boy," he purred, his old eyes beaming with kindness, "it is a bad habit, unless I invite them. But to show how much I admire your astuteness I'll ask you if you've noticed anything in regard to the defaced photographs."

I bit my lips and looked again.

"Only that some of the hands point to the back of the book and some to the front," I answered carelessly. Then in suspicious defiance, "Out with it. I know I'm stupid. But what does it signify?"

"That the deceased Vingt, even in aimlessly marring his photos, took the pains to use two sets of stamps," he returned gleefully.

"Very well," I sighed. "Am I to mention to Roger that I've given the book to Abel?"

He puzzled a moment, and then slowly replied,

"No. If he should ask you, fully admit it, and say you supposed Abel had informed him. The discontinuance of his ad would lead you to take that much for granted. If he inquires where you got it, say in New

York; and then remind him his ad promised that no questions would be asked. It will be treating him handsomely, inasmuch as we are asking no reward."

"And if Abel should naturally be curious where I got it?" I reminded.

"He knows in his own heart who stole it," said the Chief. "But if he inquires, you truthfully can say that it was procured from Roger. It will make no difference in the situation, as all the Vingt's are determined to fight this out *sub rosa*. Now, I believe that is all; only remember and deliver my message to Kimper. And by the way, I wouldn't pay any more evening visits to the Laboratory House. Good-by."

CHAPTER VIII

SOME STARTLING ODDS AND ENDS

AS A result of this conference with the Chief I had learned one positive fact: the needle, hurled so providentially into the picture album, was meant to kill. Speculation as to the assailant centered, of course, on Roger Vingt. Besides this definite knowledge I was almost as equally assured of Kimper's place in the plot. His motive for visiting the Laboratory House was patent.

Among the things left to puzzle me on the train back to Swackton was the Chief's interest in the album and yet his readiness to hand it over where Roger might again regain possession of it. I would have expected him to decide his office was the proper repository. One phase I had neglected to discuss: this was Sheriff McDoty's zeal in attributing the robbery to a haphazard gang.

As the Chief failed to mention him I began to believe he was sincere in this idiotic theory. Yet there was his declaration in the drug-store that the red tracks had an evil import; there was his readiness to escape their predilection for bald-headed men by buying hair-restorer; and there was his knowledge that the tracks were left about the bank at the time of the robbery, and had been scattered about the streets since that night. Yes, he must know something. No sane band of burglars would employ such means, before and after committing a crime, to announce their presence; and the coming of the tracks in any event, unless made by Cousin Roger,

was idiotic. So, the Sheriff puzzled me.

Then I reverted to Roger, and my brain whirled as I discovered I could ask myself several queries in regard to his motives. I could appreciate why a desperate man might attempt murder to prevent the discovery of the telltale bit of evidence, such as the book; but for the life of me I could not understand why he had left it in the Laboratory House, as if it were of no value to him. Why had he taken it, and why it alone, if it were worthless? In short, the whole affair of the burglary seemed needless and ridiculous.

As I wallowed in the sea of conundrums, I began almost to doubt Cousin Roger's complicity in the burglaries. The only thing now holding me to my first theory was the presence of the book in his house. Of course he must have taken it and must have thrown the poisoned dart; but either he was a fool, or there was some subtle undercurrent I had not yet waded into.

I got off the train at Swackton mechanically and picked my steps as one walking in his sleep. The next I knew I was prostrate in the dirt, having been violently hurled from the five-foot-high platform. A mélange of voices and growling dogs dinned on my ears as I remained supine and slowly recovered my wind. It was several seconds before I could stagger to my feet and seek an explanation.

The cause of my fall was simple. Two dogs, fighting on the crowded, narrow platform, had started a panic just as the train was pulling out; and as the crowd swept back I had been knocked flying. In no condition to save myself, it was a miracle I had not gone under the wheels. Others had been pushed into the street, but, more alive to their danger, they landed on their hands and knees; whereas I had struck on my back. Pushed against the waiting-room, angrily prodding the mob from off him and his machine, was Abel Vingt. Even after I gained my feet and had stopped to admire the dexterity with which he swung his crutches, I could catch the low, distinct flow of curses with which he addressed the scene.

I DID not linger to see the finale, as my clothing was in a disreputable condition from the mud, and my thin frame was badly shaken. But it was not until I reached the hotel and was

changing my garments that I realized the picture album was missing! This loss capped the climax of my chagrin. I could not even remember having taken it with me from the car. And how I dreaded the Chief's ironical silence when I informed him of the mishap!

Of course I telephoned the station ahead and then hastened to the Swackton depot and made a thorough search. But hunt high and low and question the loungers as I would, I could learn nothing, except that the white bull had whipped his opponent. A search of the smoker at the next stop was equally barren of results.

To add to my confusion, I met Abel Vingt on my way to the hotel. Without any hesitation I stopped him and said,

"Mr. Vingt, a short time ago I had in my possession a picture album, which I believe was stolen from your safe-deposit box, and which I intended to hand over to you. I either lost it on the train, or else during that confounded dog-fight."

He stared at me vacuously for the fraction of a minute; then his heavy jaw protruded, and he muttered,

"Lost it, eh?"

"I'm sorry to say I did."

"Might I inquire," he asked coldly, "how you came by the book?" And his eyes took on a nasty look.

"I didn't get it from the bank," I assured smoothly.

"You'll admit," he continued slowly, as if not hearing me, "that it looks unwholesome for a stranger to be in possession of stolen property, especially when he evades telling how he came by it."

"I don't care a rap how it looks," I informed sweetly. "I was trying to do you a favor. I'd advise you to visit Sheriff McDoty and tell him of the suspicious circumstances."

"I have no use for McDoty," he growled.

"Very well; then I'll tell you that I got the book of your Cousin Roger."

The shot told. He winced and drew in his chin in sullen disconcert. Then he mumbled,

"— Roger!"

"Why say that?" I laughed.

"It's a favorite expression of mine," he muttered.

"Am I free from suspicion, or would you prefer I should visit McDoty?"

"Drop it!" he snarled. "I'm ugly by

nature. I was venting my spleen on humanity a minute ago. I prefer duels, please remember. As to the book, I wouldn't give twopence for it. Tom, Dick and Harry are welcome to it. Only, a bit of friendly advice: if you are hitching up with Brother Roger in any way and are inclined to get chummy, be careful. It strikes me as undesirable that you should assume to represent my cousin and still find any occasion to have truck with Roger!"

As I stood and gnawed my finger and watched him wheel away I had to admit that to the uninitiated it did look a bit unwholesome. If he did not identify Roger as the bank robber, he could easily assume the book was restored by virtue of the advertisement, and my part in it might be that of a messenger.

But knowing what he did, I could appreciate I presented the spectacle of a man sitting on two stools. Then I fell to imagining how Roger would carry himself if Abel should inform of what I had said, and the picture caused me to grin broadly. We might not deal in poisoned darts, but we could sting, nevertheless.



MY NEXT errand was to find Kimper and deliver the Chief's message. As I turned into the store I met the Sheriff and noted that the parcel under his arm consisted of hair-restorer and that he had enough, it would seem, for a dozen of the most stubborn cases. The druggist was in the back room, and my first glimpse of his drawn face convinced me the morning's melancholy had not left him.

"Mr. Kimper," I brusquely announced, "would you go to the city to-morrow and call at the address I am prepared to give you, providing you receive the two hundred dollars recently stolen from your safe?"

He let fall a string of sponges he was handling and slumped into a chair, an inert figure.

"What do you mean?" he whispered, his eyes rolling as one in a fit of some kind.

"Just what I say," I returned, calmly studying his bearing. "Will you take three hours from your store in order to recover your money?"

His mouth opened as if he were about to speak, but instead he groaned and fell to the floor, and sprawled at my feet, unconscious.

I was not prepared for such an exhibition and I could account for it only by the the-

ory that he stood under some fearful menace and believed he was now to be undone. While speculating as to the true inwardness of his emotion I dashed water in his face and partially revived him.

But it required the services of the village doctor, who happened to be in front, to bring him fully to. Even after the restoratives prevailed the little man seemed in a bad way, and the doctor left me with him while he hastened to find somebody to assist him home. He speedily fetched Sheriff McDoty and I volunteered my services.

As the Sheriff and I drew him to his feet he kept muttering under his breath.

"He says something about a defective heart. He must have had a shock," said the Sheriff.

But as I half supported him and slowly guided his weak steps I also caught what he was mumbling and it contained no mention of organic trouble, but consisted of the one word "detective," repeated over and over.

I left him, after he had been placed in a carriage, and returned to my hotel. All the way I kept asking, Why should Kimper select that word from his half-conscious vocabulary? At the worst he merely entertained a suspicion as to who robbed the bank. And why should McDoty give it a twist so it might apply purely to a physical condition?

That night, just as I was about to call up the Chief, the landlord informed me the druggist was threatened with brain fever. Thus I had quite a budget of news when I finally got Mr. Butterworth on the wire.

"I have a mishap to report," I began.

"Haven't lost that book, have you?" broke in his quick query.

"I have," I returned sourly.

"You can give me the details when you next come in," he surprised me by saying in his usual cheery voice. "It isn't material, anyhow."

"One thing more," I added: "Kimper fainted when I delivered your message and is now threatened with brain fever."

There was a slight pause this time before he returned,

"I'm sorry to hear he is ill."

"And while half-conscious he muttered something about a 'detective,'" I concluded.

"Quite natural," said the chief pleasantly. "See Cousin R. as soon as possible. Good-by."

Now why should it be natural for an unsophisticated village druggist, even if in fear of some threat, to remark in his delirium about a "detective"? And why had the Chief seemingly anticipated the loss of the book and hear of it so composedly?

CHAPTER IX

ROGER VINGT

MY FIRST interview with Roger Vingt is tagged in memory as one of my unique experiences. Not so much because of any abnormal happenings, although my blood may have chilled a bit at times, but rather because of his personality. In fact, it seldom has been allowed me to study a character so fascinating. I can not explain the source of his personal magnetism, nor select any one charming feature of his presentment, or speech; but I do know I found myself enjoying his genial company even atop of my conviction that in heart he was a murderer. To begin with, he was always amiable in his deportment. His voice never lost its pleasing note and his smile was contagious. He was not cultured, except as extensive travel and extraordinary powers of observation had taught him much of human nature.

Before paying my respects, I telephoned to the Laboratory House and made certain he was there. He was alone, he said, and would be pleased to see me. Now that our meeting seemed assured, I could not help feeling that the pivotal point in the masked drama had been reached. My expectations were varied; I did not know what to look for. One moment had me picturing him as wildly hilarious, extravagant in manner and ready to take any desperate step. This apprehension was engendered, no doubt, by my recollection of the unusual dénouements that heretofore marked his path. Again, I was prepared to meet the prototypal Vingt, large of build and with massive head, emotionless and devoid of expression.

As he met me cordially at the door, I found him to be a man of about the medium height and heavy in build. His face was tanned by exposure to some torrid sun, except where a long scar refused to take the coloring. Ragged, iron-gray hair hung in wisps and occasionally inconvenienced his pleasant eyes, while the hint of a good-humored smile seemed to be twitching per-

petually at the corners of his large mouth.

He leaned on a rough cane as he bowed in greeting, and one hand, I noticed, was pressed in the small of his back, suggestive of rheumatic twinges. Even as my inner self cautioned me to remember the cashier and poisoned needle, I returned his smile with no thought of deceit. For the moment I was honestly pleased to have met him.

"The gentleman whom I came near receiving the other night, I believe," he observed, as he ushered me into a room off the library.

"Yes," I said. "I came, but found the house dark; I fear I was tardy."

"Sorry to have called you out on a wild-goose chase," he regretted, relieving me of my hat. "I should have realized the time was too short. I waited until the last minute, when a city appointment demanded I depart. You are interested in Swackton realty?"

"Yes; that portion embraced in the Vingt estate," I qualified.

"Well, do you know," and his tone was charmingly confidential and whimsical, "I am interested in the same, in so far as it may mean ready money for my share of the property. There are three of us to divide the estate." The last, dreamily.

Did he intend there should be three shares in the end? I asked myself, returning to my old conviction by a struggle. "You are willing to sell at the earliest opportunity?" I inquired, with my best realty air.

"I certainly am," he cried in jovial earnestness. "It's all very well for Cousin Marilla and Brother Abel to wait for the surrogate's decrees and orders to sell and a prosy partition action, and all that sort of legal rot, as they are anchored here for life. But it's dull work for an old bird of passage like me. That's where you have a chance to pick up bargains; my impatience to realize on my share and cut away for the genial South lands and be quit of this harsh climate is your profit."

Then he laughed in good-natured deprecation, and confessed, "I was never intended for a business man, you know. I only love money for what it will bring. Abel is shrewder, and enjoys only to have it. But I doubt if even he would retain his New England thrift had he lived for years in the comfortable languor of the Keys. This climate, you know, is—ah!" And his face

twisted in a disgusted, ludicrous grimace. "Rheumatism?" I sympathized.

He pursed his eyes in a droll way and confided,

"Something awful. I sometimes wonder whether, if Abel knew it had taken hold of me so keenly, he wouldn't drag the settlement along until he and Marilla could share all. There! there! Only one of my small jokes, and a poor one, too. Abel means all right, but he can't help being close. I tried to borrow fifty dollars of him last week until I could get back to town. Came away with no money. And what do you think? He wanted fifty cents for the accommodation! Why, I reckon he's got the first dollar he ever earned."

"Northern people and Northern business manners," I murmured.

"Maybe," he smiled; "but I hope you aren't as deeply tinged with that same business instinct. But if you can float the money in town, anywhere near approaching a decent amount, you can take options on my ultimate share. I'm ready to strike hands on any reasonable bargain; for, candidly, I need the money. I came North with a certain amount; not much, but enough to stake me for a while. I supposed everything would be hustled along, and now I find a drowsy court that ties up the whole estate until it can awake and be officially told my uncle is dead. I reckon you have too much respect for the courts up here."

And his eyes twinkled with a merry, evil light.

"What have you done to expedite affairs?" I asked.

"Ha! ha! one on me. Bless you! I've done nothing. Not that I could do much; no one can until the court comes to life. Yet I have here a partial description of the parcels."

And his hands began tumbling a jumble of transcripts from an old-fashioned desk.



BUT what caught and held my gaze and jarred me into my old cautious mood was a torn piece of a newspaper, the same I would have sworn was about the picture album when I lost it.

"Were any of the estate's papers taken in the bank burglary?" I inquired as I scanned a type-written summary of the holdings.

"Nothing but an old album," he return-

ed, over his shoulder, still digging out legal papers. "Advertised for it, but I fear it's gone for good."

By a deep, silent intake of the breath, I paid tribute to his monumental nerve, and composedly asked,

"It was valuable, then?"

"I don't know," he returned, looking me honestly in the eye. "Brother Abel says it's worthless; therefore I decided I wanted it." Then, carelessly, "You saw my ad, I suppose?"

"Your brother mentioned it to me," I returned.

He leaned back his head and placed his hands on his knees and chuckled audibly for a few seconds, then said,

"I reckon Abel was a bit provoked over my taking any action. Oh, well; what's the odds. Don't know as I make anything by trying to please him."

"I should think he would buy you out so you could go South," I observed.

"Why?" he quickly quizzed.

"Because he knows you won't haggle over the pennies and he could drive a good bargain," I responded promptly.

He frowned at the papers in his hands and seemed to hesitate. Then he frankly explained,

"I'm afraid it's Marilla who is holding him back from what she deems would be a premature settlement. Honestly, if Abel had his way he'd take advantage of my desire. Not because of love for me, but for the sake of a bargain. But although he is well-to-do, as you folks put it, he couldn't swing the deal unless she coöperated with him. And she—well, she's an old maid."

How the Chief would enjoy dealing with him; he was such a consummate actor! Here he was treating me solely as a real-estate agent, when I was convinced he knew far more about my movements than I did about his; but the best was his pretending that poor, timid Miss Vingt was the sole obstacle to his departure. What his motive was in granting me an audience and continuing his absurd pretense was beyond my comprehension; perhaps it was his lively desire to develop and add zest to the duel.

Or, maybe, and this was more disquieting, he might have another little surprise up his sleeve and wished to lull me into a false sense of assurance. Yet I had scored one point: I had seen the wrapper of the missing book. So if he imagined he was

having sport at my expense he was obtaining a wrong total.

"Yes," he added lazily, "Abel is ready for a bargain. But lay to it, my lad, he doesn't lose any sleep loving me." And again he laughed silently. "Why," he declared in the same tone of raillery, "I'll wager a ton of doubloons against this cane that if you've approached him on business he has gone out of his way to fire a few broadsides into his dear Brother Roger."

 MY EYES would lower in a second of uncontrol, do what I could; but if he detected their admission it only served to increase his amusement.

"Northern people, you know," he quoted me, with a sly sparkle in his eyes. Then gravely, "Hospitality up here is so formal, you know. Why, I put up in the city just to escape catching cold every time I meet a Swackton man."

"I should think you'd be afraid of leaving these papers here when you are away so much," I remarked, tapping the package.

"Pooh!" he sniffed; "they're only copies. There isn't enough in the whole house to pay a burglar day wages."

"Then you are not afraid of the red tracks?" I smiled.

He sobered a bit and after a slight pause assured, gravely, "To be serious, I do not believe I am afraid of anything. But it makes me angry when I think of the poor cashier, that is, if the tracks were connected in any way with that assault."

"You doubt if they were?" I pursued.

"I really can't conceive how they could have had anything to do with the robbery," he insisted. "They seem so foolish, so utterly without purpose. Of course, if they were not made by some joker they must be the work of a crazy person, and in that event they might be associated with any crime. Why, do you know, I even found them here in my hall and spent an hour scrubbing them out. But the cashier's case is a very serious matter; there you have a continuity of purpose—an assault, an unlawful entrance and robbery. The fact the robbers, or robber, failed to get away with any booty doesn't prove but what the plans were nicely laid. No, I repeat, the tracks and the burglaries came in conjunction by accident, purely."

"Sheriff McDoty says the burglaries were

the work of a gang of yeggmen," I said impressively.

"Pooh! McDoty seems to be of pretty poor mental caliber. Any talk about yeggmen is all rot. But why doesn't the town offer a reward?" and he raised his voice in disgust. "Why, if I possessed Abel's means I would hang up five hundred dollars, or a thousand, from my own pocket. What Swackton needs is an experienced police officer."

He grew better and better. The indignant flashing of his large eyes was one of the most genuine effects I had witnessed in a long time. It was so enjoyable I was on the point of remarking on Kimper's condition, but bethought me in time I could not well do so without again bringing in the tracks; and as I was not supposed to know of the red manuscript, I kept silent.

I had half expected he would frankly confess he had written a story about red footprints; nor would I have been greatly surprised had he done so for the chance of hinting that his cousin, Miss Marilla, had left the crimson trail. Then again I realized he probably knew that I was in the secret about his short story, but if he thought to lead me on to making disclosures, he was in error. I was not to be decoyed from my present rôle. But it was an exciting little game, and to conceal my delectation I became absorbed in the transcripts.

Suddenly I sensed I had room for more urgent speculations. I was face to face with the cashier's assailant, the looter of the drug-store safe and the would-be murderer of my Chief. To what lengths would he go in eliminating me from the plot? The fear of him struck me like an icy breath, and I no longer had thought for melodramatic repartee.

I could feel his steady eyes focused on my bowed head as I frowned at the papers and carried out my part, and the blood in my neck ran cold.

"My landlord was saying that this particular piece of property here would have to be graded extensively before it could be utilized for building lots. The house, too, would have to be torn down," I at last observed, innocently raising my eyes to meet his quizzical gaze.

"You told him you were coming to see me to-day in this matter?" he queried carelessly.

"Yes," I murmured, returning to the papers, "so he might know where to find me if any message comes during my absence."

"I wish you'd brought him with you," he regretted. "I believe I could wheedle him into making an offer for this place. Near the station and well adapted for a hotel, you know."

"But I'm to have the first chance?" I insisted.

"Always the first chance, my boy," he heartily assured. "First come, first served. That reminds me: you haven't been here before—that is, to enter. Sha'n't I show you around?"

"No, I guess it's not necessary," I said evenly. "I have a pretty good idea of the lay of the land."

And a little shiver clambered up my spine as I fell to wondering what peculiarities there might be in the lonely house which I was ignorant of.

"Then, if you'll excuse me, I'll go upstairs after some more papers. I think I have some transcripts in the attic. I'm very methodical, you'll observe." And as he left me I could hear him making sport of himself in a series of low chuckles.

CHAPTER X

A TELEPHONE CALL

IMEDIATELY after he quit the room I turned guiltily to the desk and softly opened the drawer. There was the wrapper of the lost album. And, yes! beneath it was the book itself! My hands trembled as I closed the drawer and stood irresolute. If the Chief were in my place would he take it and slip it under his coat? If I should appropriate it, would not Cousin Roger detect his loss before I could get clear of the premises? And in that event had I any assurance of getting clear? Again, proceeding on the assumption that he knew me for what I was, wasn't it probable the book was left carelessly in the desk as a bait? Last of all, how came it in his possession for the second time; and if it were worth regaining, why was it so openly displayed?

For fully three minutes I alternated between the desk and my chair, as query after query prompted first one course and then the other. I do not know just what phase

of mind was tormenting when an interruption came and startled me convulsively. It was a dash of pebbles against the window-pane. My face was distorted with a new sense of fear as I stepped to the window and gently opened it. My apprehension vanished somewhat as my gaze fell on Abel Vingt.

He was close to the window and on beholding me placed a finger on his lips, and hoarsely whispered,

"What is he doing? I saw him at the attic window."

"After papers," I as softly returned.

Palming his mouth and speaking so low I could scarcely catch it, he warned, "I heard you were here from the landlord. I wouldn't stay very late, if I were you."

And with a parting gesture of secrecy he started to reverse the levers, when I detained him by whispering:

"The picture album! Do you want it? It is here and I can pass it to you."

He eyed me blankly for a second and then noiselessly sent his rubber-tired wheels very close to the window and murmured,

"Don't touch it! Leave it alone!"

It was seldom Abel showed any agitation, but I was confident at that moment no amount of worldly gear would have tempted him to remove the book. Then in the same silent manner he shot to the corner of the house, where his machine could glide to the street behind a screen of trees.

I felt rather limp as I resumed my chair, not forgetting to lower the window. If the Chief needed the album, now was the time to obtain it. In deciding the problem, I endeavored to strike all question of personal safety entirely from the equation. Yet the emotion was ticklish, as there was no knowing just how far Roger might go in conserving his end of the duel. One fact was self-evident—he would never fight fair. Then with new force, Abel's warning came back to me. He must have been strongly apprehensive to warn me to cut my visit short. As I chewed on this, I feared it was not sufficient to have advertised the landlord's knowledge of my presence in the house.



AS I gazed furtively about, an inspiration came to me. There was a telephone on the wall and I would call up the Chief and apprise him of the situation; I might even inform of the book.

It would be an artistic stroke, and stepping to the hall door I bellowed,

"Mr. Vingt, may I use your 'phone?"

"Aye, aye," called out his cheery voice from above. "Help yourself."

And by the sound of his movements I knew he was still busy searching for the papers.

It seemed an age before I got Central and an eon before I connected with the Broadway office. At last I heard the Chief's welcome voice respond, "Well?"

With one ear cocked to catch the sound of Cousin Roger's return, I informed in a purposely loud voice,

"Am talking from Mr. Roger Vingt's Swackton residence. He kindly allowed me to use his 'phone while he looks up some papers."

Then I collected my voice for a low, clear whisper, when Mr. Butterworth's cold tones broke in, "'Beware the Greeks bearing gifts.' Scat!"

Even as I stood there, gawking at the mouthpiece and blindly trying to figure out why I should fear the Greeks bearing gifts, my puzzled ear caught two distinct clicks, and with a flush of shame at my own stupidity I hung up. For the double click told me two persons had replaced receivers, and I knew one was the man up-stairs at a cut-in telephone! The Chief did well to distrust the privacy of any conversation having an end in the Laboratory House. There was one consolation, however; he knew my whereabouts.

While I was smoothing my features, I caught the lumbering tread of Roger returning. On entering the room he pleasantly inquired,

"Couldn't you get them?"

"Busy," I returned in fierce inner glee. He need not wait for the toll slip to know I was a liar, and this knowledge amused me; for he didn't know that I knew that he knew.

"As to those other papers," he puffed, sinking wearily into his chair, "I've hunted high and low, but can't find them. I'll try to get a complete list and hand you. Abel must have them. Once you have examined the batch you may be in position to make me an offer."

"Won't you go down to the hotel and have supper with me?" I invited, rising to go.

"Sorry; but I must take the first train

to town," he replied. Then after graciously conducting me to the door, "Be careful of the steps. They're giving away and you might get a fall. Good day."

Thus ended my first interview with Roger Vingt, and I breathed more freely when I had gained the homely, friendly street and hurried on by honest men. On the surface our conversation had been commonplace, but the undercurrent, I knew, had always contained a menace. Yet I could not deny the charm of his bearing, nor the fact that his whole nature seemed to radiate goodwill.

And why had he listened at the telephone? I had not called the Chief or the Bureau by name, and unless he caught the number, his effort was without results. Then as I entered the hotel I realized for the first time I had neglected to get his New York address.

CHAPTER XI

MISS VINGT WITHDRAWS

I HAD scarcely finished informing the Chief of the day's doings when a message arrived from Miss Vingt. She desired me to call that evening, and added that she was too deeply agitated to telephone me. This was a paradox, as her voice would have flowed calmly, whereas the written note allowed her hands to indulge in their old trick of reflecting her emotions. The chirography was small and uniform in certain lines, then the words were jumbled and evidenced hysteria.

Having used up the greater part of the day with the Vingt family I was in the mood to make a complete canvass, and early dusk found me at her home. As I had feared, she was bordering on the verge of nervous prostration.

She could not tell at first why she had requested my presence beyond a vague belief that I might help her. Nor could she define in what I was to be of assistance. As usual her timorousness was based on Cousin Roger and the matter of the estate. She could not rest in mind or body, she finally declared, until the estate had been settled and she had received her share and was allowed to enjoy it in peace.

"I want Cousin Abel to be sent for," she suddenly announced. "I have definitely decided not to act as his coadministrator."

As her maid left to summon him, my first impressions of her peculiar individuality were deepened. In a way she was as much of a puzzle as either of her kinsmen. Except for an occasional discord in her irksome voice, when the want of cadence was slightly relieved by a higher inflection, her rapid utterance gave no hint of a distraught mind. But her hands were continually twisting and clenching and opening and spreading. The rest of her person might have been carved from wood.

"Has Cousin Roger been here to see you within the last day or so?" I asked.

"No." And her hands shivered.

"Have you received any more blood-and-thunder yarns?"

"Not one." And her hands were at rest for a few seconds. Then she half whispered, "But the red manuscript has mysteriously disappeared."

"How came you to miss it?"

"I—I wanted to read it again," she faltered. "When I heard poor Mr. Kimper was ill, I felt as if his sickness was caused by that story of the murderer. Instantly I wanted to read it again. Oh, it's all hateful, hateful!"

"But just what decided you to renounce your rights as administratrix?"

She seemed confused as well as perturbed, so far as her impassive face could reflect any mental disturbance, and her ear-drops trembled slightly. At last, in the same unvaried key, she said,

"I have felt for days as if something were about to happen. I experienced the same foreboding the night the tracks first appeared. But the intensity of my dread increased to such a degree this afternoon that I telephoned for you, intending to tell you I had finally decided to renounce. But you were out, and I could not use the 'phone again as it was up-stairs."

"You are physically incapacitated," I sympathized. "I did not realize it. You should have the 'phone moved down here."

"No, no," she murmured quickly. "It isn't that. I am as active as ever, but I am afraid of the second floor."

"Afraid!" I ejaculated in my incredulity.

"Yes, afraid," she repeated, more firmly. "My living-room is on the next floor and I've always had the 'phone there. But now I feel as if some one were watching me when I go there. Call it imagination, if you will; but the fear is a thousandfold stronger than

it was when once in the night I wandered into my uncle's laboratory and found all those horrible eyes glaring at me.

"Yes; I fear my own house. Yesterday I tried to conquer myself, but had to surrender at last. I ran from the room at the head of the stairs, and as I passed over the threshold the door slammed violently against me. If it had not been for my hired girl I should have been hurled to this floor. As it was, I landed in her arms near the top of the stairs. Fortunately for both of us her hand was clasping the banister."

"You investigated the room?" I asked.

"My girl examined it and found she had left the window open. She thinks the door was closed by a draft. But, coming as it did when my nerves were unstrung, it affected me strongly."

"You mustn't attribute any significance to a happening like that," I soothed, "or associate it with your uneasy mental condition. If you do, you can discover a hundred sinister omens each day of your life."

"I know it must sound silly," her dull voice confessed; "yet the whole quiet order of days seems to have changed. Within two hours after that happened my girl stepped on a cake of soap on the cellar stair, and if she had not been young and strong would have received a serious injury. It was only by chance it was not I, as I have bulbs in the cellar I always water myself."

"Miss Vingt," I smiled compassionately, "you must abandon this morbid strain. It renders you uncertain even in your physical acts. Statistics could probably show that thousands of people yearly meet with accidents by stepping on soap."

"But this cake is different from any I ever bought," she protested.

"Different from any you ever saw before?" I queried.

"No; I've seen it before. It's a new kind. You can buy it at but one place in Swackton—at Kimper's drug-store."

I remembered the needle and frowned.

"Calm yourself," I continued. "Go out of doors more and leave all worrying to my Bureau. Take no thought of business—"

"Mister Abel, ma'am," announced the maid, opening a door at the rear of the room.



HE STARED at me fixedly as he wheeled his machine up to the table, and I was glad I had not left the explanation of my real business in

the village until now. To bridge the pause I advanced and shook his cold hand warmly. There was some sincerity in my greeting, too, as I could not forget his friendly act of the afternoon.

"I left your brother immediately after seeing you," I informed. "No more real estate for me. Hereafter, I shall confine myself to representing Miss Vingt. If you have not retained counsel and need one, I could act for you."

He ignored my mention of having recently seen him, and as I released his hand he wiped it slowly on a large silk handkerchief.

"So you wouldn't mind being my lawyer, eh?"

"I'm always open to a proposition," I smiled; "also to a good real-estate deal."

"Huh!" he grunted contemplatively. "Any fool can be a lawyer, but it takes a clever man to dicker in realty. I would prophesy that should you go in for land deals you'd be skinned. By the way, did you reveal the professional side of your nature to my beloved brother?"

"I talked only real estate," I assured him, contrasting his sneering mood with his genuineness in following me to the Laboratory House.

"I had no desire to talk to his lawyer," he said shortly.

"You won't, so long as you talk to me," I declared.

"And double fees for appearing for me and Cousin Marilla, eh?"

"I couldn't appear for you at all unless your interests and hers are identical," I reminded.

"Assuming that they are," he returned dryly, "you can't conserve her rights without protecting mine; and so, I guess, I'll save my money."

"Very well," I laughed, wondering if any one ever got a penny from his close pocket.

"Might I ask why I am called here?" he next inquired politely.

"I didn't invite you," I replied pleasantly.

Miss Vingt, who had been following all this with eyes as sharp as her earrings, now broke in, with a want of modulation usually affected by clairvoyant ladies, and said,

"What is good for me is good for you, Cousin Abel. I wanted you to be present when I announced this decision—I shall not act in settling the estate!"

He pursed his lips in irritation and studied her with much displeasure.

"Well," his deep bass complained, "that means I must go it alone; for I swear Roger sha'n't be active with me. That's the way with women—you can't depend on them at a pinch."

Her determination to follow her own inclination, regardless of my Chief's wishes, irritated me. I felt she was exceeding the license usually accorded her sex. She not only was inconveniencing Abel, but she was also playing into Roger's cunning hands. Despite my efforts he had made his first point—he had frightened her from the game. So I coldly reminded her:

"My dear Miss Vingt, do you forget having retained my firm to direct you in this matter? I heartily disapprove of the way you are going ahead and ignoring us."

"It's like paying good money to a doctor and then refusing to take any of his medicine," growled Abel.

"I won't act!" she cried. "I can't. I must be freed of this sense of fear, this uneasiness of spirit."

"But you've endured it and gone through with it," remonstrated Abel, his neck growing red. "Now we come to the end. And just as we are about to go into court you kick the fat into the fire. I wonder who the first man was to groan, 'Variable and changeable is woman.'"

"I don't know, or care," she chanted. "I've made up my mind, and that ends it."

"Roger will be sorry to hear it," sneered Abel.

"If you are really determined," I now declared, realizing he could not influence her to change, "you must have the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation pick some trust company to act in your stead."

"I'll agree to anything!" she cried.

"I'll confess I don't like your suggestion," mused Abel. "It means we lose control of the estate and will be kept dangling along at the trust company's pleasure. Yet, Brother Roger would take it a million times more sorely. Now, why not use it as a lever on him? We all know what we know, and as this is a duel we'll say nothing to any one, not even ourselves. The past is dead. But what if I go to Roger and tell him what's in the wind and that any early settlement is up in the air, unless he behaves, and what if he sees a light and promises to be good? Will you, Marilla, wait un-

til we have tried that? If he withdraws his activity and we are allowed to live in peace, would you reconsider your decision?"

"No," she refused.

His silence denoted exasperation, but at last he declared,

"All right, then. I can't act alone. I won't be associated with Roger. A trust company would insist on running the whole thing. Very well; I'll withdraw also. Let the incorporation take care of us all."

"I believe you've made a wise decision," I congratulated, much pleased to have him choose this, the best course.

He regained his amiability straightway, and for the first time I saw him give way to mirth. He did not laugh aloud, but tears coursed down his cheeks, and his machine shook.

"I—was—thinking," he gasped, "of what Roger will say when he hears the news. The solution is as pleasing as it is simple. Yes, I like the idea now. The duel is ended, I guess."

Miss Vingt also revived in spirits, as was evidenced by her quiet hands. She set out wine in rare old glasses, and after drinking confusion to "all trouble makers," Abel backed his machine through the rear door and left me to draw up some routine papers.

CHAPTER XII

A BIT OF UNWHOLESOME ACTION

I WORKED steadily for some time, first at writing a long letter to the Bureau. Then, as the wall lamp proved insufficient for the more careful task of preparing waivers, I asked that the chandelier be lighted. Miss Vingt, now in excellent spirits, called the maid, and to convenience her I pushed back my chair smartly. Even as I did so the massive chandelier and its cluster of lamps fell with a crash, just grazing my knees.

I was startled to the extent of tipping over backward. My client did not move from her chair, however, but moaned softly, while the maid, holding the lighter, stood stupefied. Regaining my feet, I silently examined the wreckage by the light of the wall-lamp. The bottom of the chandelier, I shuddered to observe, was shaped like a spear-head, and I could easily appreciate that there would have been a vacancy in Mr. Butterworth's office had it struck me.

As I more fully realized my narrow escape I sank back in a chair, neither seeking to quiet the spinster nor to arouse the maid. Then I tilted my head and mechanically estimated the distance the thing had fallen; and I was galvanized into action by detecting a slight movement of the socket in the ceiling. Without a word I bounded from my chair and ran rapidly up the stairs. Not being familiar with the house, I first blundered into the wrong room and lost several precious seconds. Then I found the right door and entered.

A hurried match showed me the floor was of soft wood, laid in wide boards, and usually covered by a rug. The edges were stained in imitation of oak; but the rug was now rolled back half its width.

Taking the center of the room, I struck another match and made a careful examination of the flooring. As I expected, one board had been neatly sawed in two places. By the aid of my penknife I quickly removed this section, some twelve inches in length, and behold an arrow of light shot up from the room below! I was looking through the socket. Had I not changed my position the spear-head would have struck my neck, as I was bowed over my writing!

The arms of the chandelier alone had sufficed to crush the table to splinters. With this grim truth soaking home I became active in an endeavor to detect the human agency. There was but one point of egress—the door through which I entered. The would-be assassin had stood behind this until I entered and kneeled on the floor, or else he had escaped while I was in the other room. Then he had descended the stairs and gained the outside.

I ran to the window and pulled back the curtains and leaned out. I was just in time to catch a glimpse of a man, who walked with a cane, passing under the corner street-lamp. The night baffled minute observation; but I knew in my heart the receding form was that of my would-be slayer—the man who hurled needles—Roger Vingt!

Inflamed with but one purpose, I hurriedly replaced the rug and ran down the stairs, where I paused a few seconds to quiet the women by prevaricating as to the cause of the accident. In their confusion they did not think to question why I visited the second floor.

Once out of doors I quickly made the corner, but the darkness foiled me. For nearly

an hour I prowled about and then remembered the night train. I arrived at the railroad station just in time to see a New York flyer pull out. A reconnaissance of the Laboratory House from a safe distance failed to reveal any signs of life.



HOT with rage, I returned to Swackton's main street. Once had the red tracks dogged mysteps; twice I had been made a target of cowardly attempts at murder. I say, "I," as now I believed the poisoned needle had been intended for me. And because of these experiences I was quite ready to believe the soap on the cellar step and the slamming door were no accidents. Had Kimper been in his store I should have asked a bit about any purchasers of his new soap.

The motive was plain. If Miss Vingt was seriously injured she could not participate in the affairs of the estate. With her dead, the two brothers would divide her share. Then why not proceed with this line of reasoning and wonder whether Abel was to drop out of life? If so, Roger, the sole survivor, would gobble up all. The sour temperament of Abel had not prejudiced me in his favor; yet I was charitable enough to set his physical affliction off against any surliness. All this aside, he had a right to live—and it was my duty to warn him. Furthermore, he had warned me.

At the end of this resolution I entered Kimper's and called for a soft drink. As the clerk was telling me about his employer's condition I was joined by Abel. The furious clatter of his abbreviated crutches, as he dragged himself up the steps, announced his coming. After buying his evening paper he made his way to me and, unassisted, pulled himself to a stool.

"I believe I saw your brother when I left Miss Vingt," I began.

"Snooping around to scare the old woman, eh?" he mumbled. Then with a deep chuckle, "But wait till he learns of our latest plan. By the way, I trust he did not leave more of his devilish yarns. I stole her last one to save her mind."

"He did not enter the house, that I saw," I replied. "But I came near to being killed by a falling chandelier."

"So?" he murmured, lowering his glass to eye me questioningly. "Hardly correct deportment in a duel, eh?"

"Hardly," I said bitterly. "The fasten-

ings of the chandelier had been loosened—purposely. It just missed me."

He glared in his odd way for a moment and then took a long drink. Then he asked, "You think it was no regular accident?"

"I saw the socket move in the ceiling after it was all over. I found where the flooring had been removed," I explained.

This bit of intelligence threw him into meditation. At last I sought to arouse him by observing,

"By the way, if Miss Vingt were to die and you were to die, I suppose Roger would get all."

His glass was crashed into many splinters on the marble slab as he snarled,

"Not by a — sight! Not a penny of my share would he get! For to-morrow I'll make a will, leaving it all to the town—to a library—to the devil—to anything, or any one, before he shall touch it. What is more, I'll put in a clause bequeathing half my estate to the person who brings a crime home to him and makes him pay the full price. A duel's a duel, and family pride commands consideration, but once I'm dead, Roger can go to the devil a-flying."

"I really believe too much money would spoil him," I murmured.

"None of mine will," he replied grimly. Then sliding from the stool, he resumed his crutches and curtly invited, "Just follow me for a minute. I'm not planning on dying, you know."

A bit puzzled I followed him to a rear counter, where sporting goods were for sale. Selecting a revolver he tossed over a bank-note, then indicated a box of cartridges, and after receiving them growled,

"Good tonic for those who are ailing, eh?"

"The same kind your brother bought a few days ago," volunteered the gum-chewing clerk.

"Why," I cried softly, "at times a gun is better support than a cane, I take it. Give me one of the same."

"Don't buy any cartridges," whispered Abel, with the old economical light brightening his eyes. "I'll sell you half of mine. I'll divide when we get alone."

"Hand them to me to-morrow," I smiled, enjoying his avarice. "I don't think I shall have to practise any to-night."

On leaving him I returned to the hotel and was immediately summoned to the telephone by the Chief.

"I hear a new insurance agency is about to open an office in your town," he briefly communicated. "I should prefer that you are not seen about that office. That is, not until you have my sanction."

Totally in the dark, I returned,

"Very well, sir. But my estate came near to realizing on my policies this evening."

"Is that so?" he condoled. "Anything with sewing in it?"

"No; falling chandeliers," I explained.

"That removes the taboo," he said earnestly. "Visit the new agency at once and take out one of their unique policies."

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHIEF TAKES THE REINS

IT WAS Ezra Stackpole Butterworth! I could see only the top of his white head above the drop curtain, but it was enough to rivet my feet and cause my long face to crinkle with pleasure. Over the door was a neat sign, reading:

BURGLAR - PROOF POLICIES ON UNIQUE RISKS

The office had sprung into existence according to schedule and the Chief was in charge.

As I stood without and feasted on his presence I almost hoped Roger would keep up his devilry and sign no truce. For now that the Chief had come to quiet Swackton to have it out with him, I found it all pleasingly sportsmanlike and exhilarating. Let Roger do his worst: it would only add zest to the entertainment. The ground was measured off, the stake was large, the principals were ready, and the maternal strain gaining the ascendancy, I cried to myself, Hurrah for the duello!

Then the Jethuel ego sobered me and reminded I was in need of a policy.

As I entered he was dismissing Swackton's only jeweler.

"There, Mr. White; let the burglars come. You're prepared for them now with burglar insurance," he was saying.

When we were alone I asked, "Is this Mr. Butterworth?"

"Mr. E. S. Butterworth," he returned pleasantly, "duly accredited agent for these companies." And he indicated on the wall

the framed advertisements of various concerns. Even a casual survey showed his office full-fledged as to equipment.

"What are the rates for a policy against death by murder?" I inquired.

"Ahem! that depends. We can make it very reasonable where we insure against death at the hands of a given individual. Against a band of conspirators it is more, and against a corporation it is quite high. In fact, we are not working over-hard to get the last class of business. Suppose you tell me the conditions which lead up to your application."

I forthwith related in detail what had occurred in Miss Vingt's house the night before; I also described very fully my interview with Roger.

"Well," he declared, after biting the penholder for nearly a minute, "it's time we wound this thing up. We'll do it within two or three days and thus have the stage cleared for the surrogate. As to the picture album, I don't care for it, nor does any one. I am glad you didn't take it."

"But why did Roger steal it from the bank and then bother to regain it?" I puzzled.

"When it was taken from the bank it possessed a value," he explained. "But shortly after I discovered it in his house, it depreciated in value. For I removed this." And from a mass of loose papers he fished out a leaf of the album. "I was rather skilful in detaching it," he smiled, "and I'd defy any one, going by appearances alone, to detect its absence. But Roger knows the book is useless to him now."

"What did it originally show, or what does this show now?" I eagerly inquired.

"The fact that the deceased Vingt made a will and concealed it. Here we have the leaf," and he held it up as a teacher puts a small boy through an object-lesson. "The leaf contains a picture—a picture of a house, with a lady standing in front. Now, can any one tell me what this is the picture of?"

I mechanically raised my hand, and said, "The Laboratory House, sir."

"Very good, Jethuel; very good. Now, who can tell me the lady's name? Wait; take my glass. Now."

At first I was doubtful, and then cried,

"It's Miss Vingt, teacher."

"Very good, indeed," he beamed. And then: "Now, what is lacking in this pic-

ture, which we've noticed in the other pictures?"

I frowned and eyed it in perplexity.

"Tut! tut!" he cried impatiently, rapping my knuckles with his ruler. "No guessing. Do you know, or don't you?"

"Why, it hasn't any hand stamped on it," I grinned.

"Good! Next, describe the lady's position."

"She is standing by the gate and has a hand resting on the gate-post," I droned.

"What hand, Jethuel?"

"The right hand, teacher."

He tipped his spectacles well forward and chuckled heartily.

"Well, my boy, so much for fun. When I was a younker I use to teach school in New Hampshire, you know. To be serious, you'll remember one half of the album had little hands pointing to the back of the book, the other half had hands pointing to the front. This leaf, the only one not defaced, was the dividing line. Therefore, all the hands pointed to it. Again, the defaced photographs contained pictures of various bits of realty that the old man possessed. Very well; if the album had any significance it meant that he intended that a portion of his realty, if not all, should go to the woman in the unmarked photo. Assuming that he made a will and concealed it—for if he made one he certainly concealed it—it was hidden about his favorite workshop, the Laboratory House. But the house was old and might easily be destroyed. Again consult the picture——"

"The iron gate-post on which Miss Vingt is resting her hand!" I cried.

"Correct. That's where he concealed his last will and testament. Her hand, unknown to her, is utilized as the final index. Now, Roger had not figured all this out when I purloined the book, else he would not have troubled to regain it. Then after studying it anew and failing to make anything of it, and knowing you had had it in your possession, he left it out almost openly when you called. Next, he left you alone with it. Had you taken it, he would have decided it was of value to you, or to whoever employed you; but in that event, in all probability, you never would have got clear with it."

"But how did he get it from me?" I asked. "I didn't see him in the train, or at the station."

"Apparently you didn't see anything until you were jolted out of your day-dream," he smiled. "But the fact remains, he recovered the book."

"Granted. Now, what shall we do with this key he failed to get?"

"Request Abel Vingt to call here and I'll give it to him," he directed.

"Can't trust me to take it to him," I grimaced.

"Tut! tut! I don't believe a second dog-fight could be planned so conveniently, but I want to talk with Abel."



AS A result of his inclination I found Abel and delivered the message. Immediately after the noonday meal he wheeled up to the new insurance office and dragged himself inside.

After I had presented the Chief and had explained he was my employer and Miss Vingt's attorney, Abel thawed out in what for him was an unusual degree. Mr. Butterworth canvassed the situation fully with him, and convinced him that there was but one way to deal with Roger, viz., to show him no quarter.

"For if you compromise in any way it means the fight will be renewed and kept alive until one of the principals gains a decisive victory," the Chief concluded. "This must be his Philippi."

"You're right," agreed Abel heavily; "if ever I've thought of compromising, it was merely to spare my cousin. As for Roger, my desire has been, and is, to fight him, and fight him hard. Now, what about the possible will? Who is to obtain it? You, or I? And when is the move to be made?"

"I don't think it is a matter of hours," mused the Chief. "Roger has no inkling, or the chandelier would not have fallen last night. Perhaps it would be better to move circumspectly, say, under cover of night, as it is possible we are on a wrong scent and nothing awaits us. In event of that disappointment we do not want a crowd of curious ones, including Roger, to witness our *faux pas*. It would only give him additional opportunity to irritate us. What do you say to to-morrow night, with my assistant and me turning the trick?"

"It's good of you to do the work," said Abel, "although I'd like to take a hand. But, of course, I'd be only in the way. Yet, why not to-night?"

"You are not to get impatient," smiled the Chief. "Remember, I must get acquainted a bit with your village, so if the red tracks chase me I'll know what cover to hunt."

"I guess the tracks are dished for all time," said Abel grimly. "Well, so be it; to-morrow night, then. Only, call me up on the 'phone, if you can't in person, the minute the business is finished. I'll be anxiously waiting to know the result. It will be a jolt to Roger."

"Unless your uncle has made him sole beneficiary," suggested the Chief.

"I'll gladly take any chance on that," growled Abel. "My uncle never had much use for runaways and ne'er-do-wells. It means Cousin Marilla and I divide the estate."

After Abel departed Mr. Butterworth explained that he was authorized to write fire and burglar insurance policies by several companies, and that his offer to take unique risks was merely a bit of a whim, with no expectations of any abnormal business being offered. In the rôle of insurance agent he would be at liberty to intrude almost anywhere—even on Roger Vingt himself.

"And do you know," he said, "I have a great admiration for that man's mentality? Its evil trend is purely an incident. What I admire is his ability to work in an unusual way. Who else would have thought of that horripilation—the red manuscript—and likewise would have possessed the genius to create it? After deciding on a novel effect he has the power to produce it. He reminds me of those stories where a man is marooned on a desert isle, with nothing but his underclothes, yet ultimately leaves in his own palatial steamship, after surrounding himself with all the luxuries of life. Yes, I must meet him, and have a good old-fashioned talk."

CHAPTER XIV

BULLETS FLY

IN THE afternoon he trotted about town, soliciting insurance, but for the real purpose of getting the lay of the land. Incidentally, he did manage to write considerable burglar insurance, as the tradesmen had learned a lesson by the bank robbery. As evening wore on, he sauntered by the hotel, which was the signal for me, waiting

on the veranda, to join him in a further reconnaissance.

"Where to?" I inquired.

"Your house that yawns," he returned, much to my surprise.

"But you told Abel it wouldn't be till to-morrow night?" I reminded.

"Have you any religious scruples about my simply surveying the premises by moonlight?" he returned testily.

The night was favorable for our purpose. As we left the main street and swung around, fronting the building, the Chief murmured:

"You are right, Jethuel: the house is yawning. As a rule I'm not much given to poetic fancies. But you are quite correct: the house yawns."

"Shall we return now?" I suggested presently.

"No," he slowly opposed; "let's go up here on the bank and watch the night a bit. Why should men's inclinations run counter to their climatic environment? Here we have a soft, sweet-smelling sward; all is peace, yet men's passions, even in this quiet spot, are unwholesome and turn to violence. Up under the northern star, where desolation and hateful cold fill the year, you'll find simple folk, no doubt, largely actuated by peace and good-will. It's inexplicable that nature could have drawn so far away from the biped."

This was his way, when given to a moment's repose; always descanting upon something whimsical. How much longer he would have mused aloud, if not for an interruption, I do not know. But just as he was advocating something fantastic in regard to the obligations of department stores to newly married couples, he stopped short and pressed my arm and pointed to the house. A figure was standing on the front steps.

"Roger!" he whispered.

As if in answer to his murmured ejaculation the figure moved slowly down the walk, coming toward us, and by the moonlight I could see it was leaning on something—a cane.

"Yes, my friend of the falling chandelier," I muttered.

"Quiet!" he warned.

"Has he seen us?" I whispered.

He murmured a negative and sank back, pulling me beside him. The trees behind us threw a friendly shadow. Roger, for now I

was convinced it was he, idled about the walk for nearly a minute and took time to whistle a wild, ranting lilt, the words of which, I'll wager, had to do with pirates and a bloody sea.

"Doubtless reminiscent of the Dry Tortugas," murmured the Chief, thinking my thought.

"He's at the gate," I needlessly observed.

"He's trying to carry it away," corrected the Chief.

"Great Scott! He has even selected the right post!" I gasped.

"And he's removing the iron cap in a very dexterous manner," added the Chief, with a sniff of interest.

"There! he reaches in his arm! He has the will!" I faintly bleated.

"He thinks he has," qualified the Chief composedly. "But in reality he has only a type-written excerpt from the 'Modern Cook Book,' on 'How to Prepare Grape Fruit.' Very instructive, I assure you."

"Then?"

"Then it means some one has been ahead of him? Yes, I visited the post for five minutes the other night. Came out on one train and went back on the next."

"You found the will?"

"I did. But, quiet. Now he retreats. Well, we may as well go home."

"But why tell Abel we'll call here to-morrow night?" I protested.

"Doesn't it strike you as peculiar that Roger should guess our secret?" he returned, with a touch of impatience.

"Abel told him this afternoon, and they are in collusion," I murmured, thunder-struck at the cripple's duplicity.

"We two and Abel were the only ones in the secret," he affirmed. "I selected to-morrow night so that Roger might have a chance to exploit any recently acquired knowledge. Some one has been babbling."



IN RETRACING our steps we swung around the Laboratory House at a goodly distance, following a lonely road. The Chief had just assured me he had not as yet opened and examined the will, when the crack of a revolver sounded on our left and was accompanied, almost instantly, by two more reports. We were in the moonlight and at the first explosion the Chief dropped, dragging me with him. I had no doubt that he had been hit, and as I saw a head and pair of arms

leaning around the end of a billboard I whipped out my revolver, and in rapid succession emptied it—shooting to kill.

Even in my frenzy at the Chief's plight I felt a savage elation in avenging him. I had no doubt as to the result of my volley, as my one pastime for many years had been firearms, and at the distance, with the gleaming billboard for a background, I could not miss once in a thousand shots.

"Did you get him?" drawled the Chief.

"You're safe?" I cried.

"Except as I've soiled my clothing," he assured. "Did you shoot to kill?"

"To kill," I repeated grimly.

"Then the duel is ended," he sighed, rising, for he knew my skill. "But I had looked forward to chatting with him. Well, let's go over and review the remains."

To our astonishment we found nothing.

"I couldn't have missed," I cried angrily.

As if in answer there came another explosion, but we heard no bullet.

"I'm afraid you did," he railed. "Let's see; he was about here. Now, how near did you come to him. Why, Jethuel, my boy, you didn't even hit the billboard."

"Impossible!" I protested. But he was correct.

"Let me see your weapon and cartridges," he commanded.

I produced both, feeling much disconcerted.

"No wonder," he chuckled. "These cartridges are blanks. Who loaded your gun?"

"Abel," I cried. "I called at his house for my share of the cartridges just before joining you at the hotel. He offered to load my revolver, and did. I never examined either the weapon or the shells."

"The evidence that blood is thicker than water increases," he grinned. "Moral—buy your own ammunition."



BUT the surprises of the night were not yet over. For we had not been in the insurance office more than ten minutes when some one tried the door. The Chief motioned me behind a screen in the corner and, turning the key, admitted his visitor. It was Roger Vingt.

From my hiding-place I could see that his face still wore the old, merry expression, although the lines about his mouth were deeper, as if some strong emotion were at play beneath the surface. I never saw Mr. But-

terworth more highly pleased than when he heard the name and invited him to be seated. It was just the situation he inclined to; but for myself I regretted not having a real cartridge in my gun.

"And what can I do for Mr. Roger Vingt?" purred the Chief, resuming his chair and pushing his spectacles back on his forehead. "By the way, I have met your brother, a Mr. Abel Vingt."

"It's because of that same genial relative that I'm here," half laughed Roger. "He tried to murder me to-night."

"Well! well!" murmured the Chief. "How extraordinary! But as I'm not the sheriff I suppose your call is in regard to one of our unusual policies."

"Yes," affirmed Roger soberly, "I want to be insured against being murdered by Abel Vingt. As I understand it, you not only pay the amount of the policy to my estate in event of my death, but you also take means to prevent my dying from the hand I'm insured against. Of course I'm merely after the protection. Ordinarily I can take care of myself, but against your own brother, you know, you can't have much protection."

"Yes, we naturally take steps to prevent any realization on a homicide policy," said the Chief, "but one thing we require is that you endeavor to protect yourself. We insist, in the first place, that you always carry a weapon similar to this."

And to my great glee he carelessly produced a Colt's .44 and laid it on the desk so that it pointed toward his caller.

Roger reached out a hand as if to take it, but the Chief brushed him back, crying,

"Be careful! Don't touch it; it's loaded."

The rogue never carried himself better than when he settled back, never seeking to get out of range. Nor did the Chief bother to remove the menace. I breathed easy and began to enjoy the situation.

"Motive for prospective killing?" murmured the Chief, bowing over a blank policy.

"That he may divide my share in the Vingt estate with one other next of kin," returned Roger firmly.

"H'm! How much did you think of having the policy call for?"

"Say, one hundred thousand dollars."

"Well, Mr. Vingt, in that case the premiums would have to be fixed by the home office," was the grave return. "To be rank with you, in ninety-nine per cent. of

these policies the risk stands in but little danger of being made away with. In your case, however, there seems to be a radical motive, one that might endure; and this entirely apart from your brother's moral status. Now if there were something to offset this motive, say, the possible existence of a will——"

"My uncle died intestate," broke in Roger.

"Huh! no getting around it. How did he attempt your life?"

"By shooting."

"Did you see him?"

"I couldn't swear. He was in the shadow, yet I know it was he."

"Well, Mr. Vingt, I'll write in to the home office and inform you of their reply in a day or so."

"Do I get any protection in the meantime?"

"Certainly. Deposit fifty dollars with me to-morrow and we guarantee you shall meet with no harm from the suspected source until we've passed upon the risk. If you are accepted as a risk your deposit will count on your premium. Any particular time when the danger is most vital?"

"Yes; I should say three days hence, when the surrogate's court opens."

"Very well, you will be safeguarded. Fifty dollars to-morrow, please."

"But couldn't I borrow this until I can provide myself?" And he again reached for the blue-steel revolver.

"I'm afraid not," regretted the Chief, mechanically removing it. "It is part of my office furnishings. But I assure you, you will meet with no harm to-night."

"I'm not nervous, you know," he apologized, rising and grasping his cane, "and yet a man owes it to himself not to be rash."

"Quite right, Mr. Vingt," agreed the Chief heartily. "You owe it to organized society, too, to discourage any lawless act. Pleased to have met you. Good night; sleep easy."

"Well, what do you think of that?" I gasped, when it was safe for me to emerge.

"Beautiful, my boy, beautiful!" cried the Chief. "But wait, the duel is not quite finished yet. And oh! to think you might have refused this case. By the way, remind me to purchase a new hat in the morning. Mine has two holes through the crown. An inch lower—eh?"

CHAPTER XV

THE CONTENTS OF THE WILL

THE one thing to now stir up my impatience was the Vingt will. My Chief, after Roger left him, postponed a reading of the instrument until the morrow on the plea of fatigue. It requires no imagination to picture me approaching the insurance office at an early hour. Yet the Chief was before me; and as he sat lost in meditation I knew he had already learned the contents of the will.

"Sit down," he directed brusksly. "I suppose I must go over it again for your curiosity's sake. To begin with, read this statement concealed together with the will."

Eagerly I devoted myself to the paper, and read:

To my executor, George L. Kimper:

You will doubtless consider it a peculiar thing that after making a will and, unknown to you, naming you as executor, I should go to the trouble of concealing the same—and to conceal it in such a place. You naturally would expect me to leave it with my lawyer, or place it in my safety-deposit box, or else leave it with you, providing I had cause to fear the custody of my own house. But the lawyer who drew it is dead, banks have been robbed, and you might have refused to accept it. Therefore I have taken the unusual precaution to hide it here, in this stanch iron gate-post.

Now for my motive. I am not sure of Abel. At times I have been on the point of destroying my will and allowing him and my niece, Marilla, to divide the property. His physical affliction, let alone his being my only kinsman, would demand this course if I were sure of his moral status. But for years I have experienced a fear, a suspicion, that beneath his exterior presentment there existed a terrible personality. Again, at times, I have half decided I was cruelly unjust to him. Yet the predominating impression has been that of suspicion.

At last, to still my uneasy self, I have decided to study him for one year—to place him under the mental microscope for twelve months. This period of scrutiny shall be the final test. If at the end of the year his character bears the last analysis, I will destroy this instrument and leave him half of my property, and no longer be tortured by the fears that have intermittently assailed me—fears I can not set down, lest after all I be wronging him.

In defacing my album and leaving a crude key to this hiding-place I have followed a whim and have no expectations that it will ever be made use of, or understood, or even suspected. For at the end of a year I will either tear up the will, or else apprise you of its existence and duly deposit it in some rational place of safe-keeping.

I am, in fact, writing this with no idea it will ever come before your eyes. I am writing it simply to please myself, to wash my mind clear of all mechanical details, just as I idly write out a formula in the course of my investigations, regardless that it is

engraved on every tissue of my brain, or as a man makes unmeaning marks on his paper while focusing his thoughts on something vital.

Now I have, in my odd way, taken such steps as I can. And from now on the album reposes in my deposit box, the will in this post, and Abel begins his probation.

Beneath his signature was the date, and rapidly casting back I exclaimed,

"Why, he died either two or three days before the year was up."

"Two days, to be exact," said the Chief quietly. "He doesn't mention Roger."

"No one knew Roger was alive at that time," I reminded. "But the will?"

"It is brief. It gives Abel the income on fifty thousand dollars so long as Marilla Vingt remains alive. Quite subtle, eh? If she dies before Abel, the entire estate is to be devoted to certain charitable and religious associations—ten in number, I believe. Miss Vingt gets life use of the estate, with the exception of Abel's trust fund. In event of his dying before she does, she is to receive the entire property unconditionally, with the suggestion that she make some provisions in her will for the institutions herein named. That's all."

"No wonder he would act in collusion with Roger," I murmured, not yet over my astonishment at the testator's radical distrust. "Why, if Roger had secured this document he would have played 'Silas Wegg' to Abel's modern 'Boffin' for at least half of the estate."

"If no one happened to die," smiled the Chief. "And we'll never know what decision the deceased had arrived at when he died."

"In fact, we don't know but what he intended to destroy the will," I suggested.

"I wonder if we don't," mused the Chief. "When passing out, unable to speak, he went through the motion of using the rubber stamps. Miss Vingt had often seen him toy with them in his lifetime. He often defaced the album in her presence. And he wanted her to associate his last pantomimic effort with that book. Fortunately for her she did not attach any significance to his gestures and set it all down as the mechanical action of his hands. I say she was fortunate in being thus obtuse, for had she surmised the truth she would have immediately told Abel and the will never would have been found. It is well for her that you followed my instructions and kept me informed of everything, no matter how triv-

ial. It was her gossiping recollection of her dying uncle's last physical act that gave me my first clue."

"Now what shall we do with it, and how are we to treat Abel?"

"As her attorney I will retain the custody of the will until surrogate's court opens, when I will file it. As to Abel, he must notice no difference in our demeanor, just yet."

I turned it over in my mind once or twice, and then suddenly asked,

"Was it Roger, or Abel, who spoiled your hat last night?"

He laughed silently before he returned,

"Really, I haven't decided that point yet. Roger says Abel tried to kill him. If he speaks true, Abel was abroad and might have taken a shot at us, just for luck. On the other hand we were proceeding on the theory that Roger knew of the hidden will from Abel, and that they were acting in concert against Miss Vingt."

"Maybe Roger's story about the attempt at murder was merely a blind to deceive us," I suggested.

"Maybe," agreed the Chief, still wrinkling his face in an odd expression. "And then we have the theory that after confiding the secret to Roger and waiting for him to obtain the will—thus acting the catspaw—he endeavored to get the paper and destroy his brother all in one night."

"It certainly is logical," I declared.

"But, remember, my boy," he continued kindly, "the world is filled with 'maybes.' Every error in life bears its impress. The most conservative time to build your theories is after the case is finished. In other words, never become so deeply attached to any theory that you feel duty bound to go forth and hold a brief for it."

"Our old friend Abel approaches," I diverted.

"And very glad we are to see him. Remember our appointment for to-night still stands. He'll be very sorry to learn the will is missing," cautioned the Chief.

"If he knows the nature of Roger's find he can readily believe some one has the whip-hand of him," I grinned, just as the cripple dragged himself up the steps.



"GOOD morning, Mr. Vingt," saluted the Chief in his cheeriest manner. "And how is Mr. Vingt this morning?"

Abel hitched into a chair and his gaze

was almost mournful as it centered on me. He ignored Mr. Butterworth's greeting and seemed not to realize his presence.

"Young man," he finally found words to say, "I feel cheap, dirt cheap. I only hope you haven't discovered the cause. Tell me, have you tried your revolver yet?"

"Not as yet," I fibbed, appearing very honest, as was indicated by the Chief's satisfied smirk.

Abel breathed deeply, as if a load had been removed from his mind, and his heavy face cleared as he rumbled,

"Then I can forgive myself a bit. I gave you some confounded blank cartridges last evening. It was dusk and I didn't bother to light a lamp. When I ascertained my mistake this morning I couldn't rest until I hurried to you and confessed my carelessness. Thank heaven you haven't had an occasion to discover the error. Here is what you should have received."

And he placed a box, half filled, on the desk.

Mr. Butterworth's face was a picture; it was simply filled to repletion with delight. He even hugged his knees as he writhed in silent enjoyment of the scene. I made little of the incident, assuring Abel it was of no consequence and that I regretted his having suffered any inconvenience because of it.

"I'm glad it's off my mind. By the way, our mutual friend, Roger, met me on his way to the station this morning and taking advantage of my pointing this way, asked me if I would not hand you this letter."

As the Chief tore open the envelope and allowed a fifty-dollar bank-note to flutter to the floor, he could not restrain tears of delight.

"My dear Mr. Vingt," he choked, "this is the best yet. Listen; you'll enjoy this. Roger sends me fifty dollars, together with an application for a homicide policy. He states that his brother Abel is the man he fears. Isn't it rich?"

Abel's mouth popped open as if he would cry out, but he made no sound for several seconds. Then he gasped,

"He would get insured against *me*? Against *me*? Well, I'll be ——!" Then in a bellow of rage as the full situation flashed upon him, "And he made me his messenger!"

"Tut! tut!" soothed the Chief. "Had I known you would have taken it so seriously I wouldn't have let you into the joke. Of

course, I know you'll never kill Roger Vingt. But if he wants to pay premiums for fear you may, I must take his money, else he'll wonder why I'm in the business. Remember, Roger only knows me as an insurance agent. You are the only person, outside of my assistant, whom I have trusted in full."



BUT Abel could not be pacified for several minutes. He repeatedly jabbed his crutches at the empty air and muttered something to himself, which almost led me to doubt whether he were in collusion with Roger after all. Not that I hesitated in deciding that he had been; but it impressed me now as though the two had broken their compact and were at war.

At last, by a mighty effort, he controlled his voice and temper and contented himself with promising,

"I'll be even with him yet."

"But only by just methods," warned the Chief benignly. "With the game in your hands it would be too bad to spoil it by any unfavorable act, even if the moral side of the situation could be entirely ignored. Wait patiently and conquer him by fair means."

"Well, I'll try to hold myself in," growled Abel. "Fish out that will to-night and maybe it'll even things up to my satisfaction."

The Chief could not refrain from bending forward to pat one burly shoulder, so dearly did he admire the man's duplicity. There he sat, after betraying us to Roger and incidentally compelling the Chief to purchase a new hat—Swackton style—and yet planning on our finding the instrument. Usually there is a facial display of insincerity in the most hardened rogue, providing you are searching for it. But I could take my oath that Abel's features reflected only injured pride, honest anger, and impatience for the night's finale, as he faced us and cried out against the wickedness of his brother.

"We shall find the will," assured the Chief enthusiastically, punctuating his promise by picking up and brandishing that very instrument. "We shall find it, even if we have to remove both gate-posts."

"I hope so," growled Abel. "I would be willing to be disappointed quite a bit in my expectations if only Roger could be eternally ousted from this village."

"He shall be ousted," promised the Chief gravely. "He shall leave Swackton forever inside of twenty-four hours. So rest in patience a bit longer. Furthermore, I solemnly declare that you shall receive justice. I am not your attorney, but without boasting I can lay claim to one great desire: I wish to see all men get justice."

"I almost wish I'd retained you," regretted Abel. "But if you do well by Marilla, I'll get the benefit of your efforts and save my fee."

"I'll do as well by you as though I had accepted your retainer," returned the Chief.

Abel seemed much impressed by this display of friendliness, and tried in his heavy way to return an adequate expression of appreciation as he prepared to leave us.

"Not a word, not a word," protested the Chief. "I'm doing no more for you than I would for any honest man. What's more, if you'll be here shortly after dinner you shall witness the first step in unraveling a mystery."

"I'll be here," said Abel, his eyes wandering from Mr. Butterworth to my impassive face.

"Did you mean all you said?" I asked, after his machine had turned the corner.

"All," returned the Chief firmly.

"Even to driving Roger from the village?" I persisted.

"Even that," he repeated, as if weary.

But I was hungry to know all, and continued,

"And you'll surely make a revelation this afternoon?"

"You shall enjoy it," he promised. Then in a bit of irritation, "But I protest, if the court please, that this cross-examination is exceeding its inherent license. How can a man furnish a surprise if made to divulge it prematurely?"

"Meaning, if it please the court," I murmured, "that you prefer——"

"Meaning that I should not be heart-broken if you studied the village architecture during the morning hours, returning here at 1:30 o'clock sharp."



I BOWED meekly at this suggestion, but could not resist observing,

"I have often wondered just what part I am playing in this little bucolic drama, sir. I have often speculated as to the exact value

of an employee who continually walks in the dark, denied even a candle."

"My boy," he beamed, tipping his spectacles to the end of his nose, "as a rule I object to promiscuous speculation on the Bureau's time. But as you are young and sensitive I will say: Sometimes in the chase—now, pardon the figure I'm employing—a little pup happens to tree big game. He stands and barks as if his little soul would burst, with no particular purpose, mind you. Yet the old dogs hear his clamor and rush to him and land the quarry. Now if the little pup knew his prize was a big bear, or a panther, and so on, he might forget to bark and sneak away to chase rabbits. Or he might be more foolish and with absurd egotism save his wind for an idiotic endeavor to bag the game unassisted. In either event he is of small aid to the older dogs. It is only when he puts his whole heart into barking, and thinks naught of anything else, that he earns his keep."

"In other words?"

"In other words—now, Jethuel, remember this is all figurative language—you are the pup and your barking has aroused the cunning old hound."

"I go to study village verandas," I said humbly.

His was the right of it, after all. I had stirred up the wolf, I had blundered along his trail; if I were capable of completing the chase unaided I would be conducting an Abnormal Bureau of my own. So I obeyed his instructions to the letter, experiencing, meanwhile, a new sense of relief. No matter what happened, I was off duty. And I looked about the town with never a care until the dinner-hour.

But no surcease could keep me away from the promised finale. I was like a child, who, not knowing what he has found, carries his discoveries to his master and stands and wonders what the master will make of it. Of one thing I was positive, I had not brought trash.

CHAPTER XVI

A MINOR EXPOSÉ

PROMPTLY on the hour I returned to the office. Despite my zeal, Abel had preceded me. From the manner in which he kept consulting his watch I decided he was either nervous or impatient. When I

had quietly taken a chair, the Chief said:

"First, I want to say that the mysterious red tracks were made by a sandal-like device, which often has been employed before this for advertising purposes. Ten or fifteen years ago many villages were inconvenienced by their use. Many trails of tracks would be discovered in the morning, all leading to a grocery store, and so on. Then ordinances were passed, declaring them a nuisance, and as the novelty wore off and the law took effect, they were discontinued, possibly forgotten. The device consists of a double sole, strapped on to the shoe. At each step a certain amount of powder—usually white—is allowed to sift through, leaving the imprint of a foot. When disturbed by soap and water it looks like paint. A broom should always be used first. Next, the red tracks in this town followed as a natural sequence of Roger Vingt's red manuscript!"

I nodded complacently, while Abel, to my surprise, seemed to find something of novel interest in this preliminary ancient history.

"Now," continued the Chief, elevating his voice a bit, "I will introduce—with just a touch of melodrama—two of Swackton's citizens, who have been deeply concerned in the doings of the red tracks. Here they come."

And Kimper, the druggist, and Sheriff McDoty marched up the steps.

"What does it all mean?" cried Abel.

"Tell them, Mr. Kimper," urged the Chief.

"I made the red tracks," confessed Kimper faintly.

I sank back, thoroughly bewildered.

"What for?" gasped Abel, who of course had figured, as had I, on Roger.

"To advertise my hair-restorer," groaned the druggist, producing and depositing a parcel on the desk.

"And this package contains the device?" queried the Chief.

"It does, and I wish I had never seen it!" cried Kimper.

"I ascertained yesterday that Mr. Kimper was quite convalescent," explained the Chief. "And at my request he obligingly agreed to be here to-day."

"Where did you get the idea?" I mumbled.

"From reading that red foot-print story of Roger Vingt's," replied the little man wearily.

"And the bank burglary?" cried Abel.

"Oh, I know nothing about that," moaned Kimper. "Please don't accuse me of being more'n a derved fool. I made a call at the bank, just because Jellyby, the cashier, is bald-headed. I intended calling on every bald-headed man in town. Then came the robbery and spoiled my plans."

"And your own store was looted?" prompted the Chief.

"Yes, I did it. I robbed myself," confessed the druggist, almost in tears. "When the bank was robbed, McDoty said I must do something to avoid any suspicion, so I robbed myself, broke into my own safe."

"McDoty?" I cried in amazement.

"Yes, he was in it with me. He was to work up apprehension among bald-headed men and by his example to influence them to buy hair-restorer," feebly explained the druggist.

"Did you sell much?" grinned the chief.

"Nearly a hundred bottles," sighed Kimper. "But the robbery spoiled everything."

"But what about the tracks that followed us, when I helped you home from the Laboratory House?" I asked.

"You see, sir," he explained, "I had them derved things on at the time. I wore them up there, intending to leave them—to get quit of them. But my nerves give out in that room of eyes, and I collapsed. It was McDoty who suggested that step. When you took me home I made a new trail, of course. When I neared the house I knew enough to walk on the grass. That's why the trail seemed interrupted. After you left me at the door I kicked them off."

"Sheriff, do you bear Mr. Kimper out in what he has said?" demanded the Chief gravely.

McDoty sighed dolefully, and speaking for the first time, said,

"In everything. I couldn't see no harm in it. It was just an innocent game to us until the bank was robbed."

"But why did Kimper break down so completely when I informed him he could recover his money by going to town?" I pursued, feeling much chagrin as I recalled my theory on that occasion.

"Because he knew I knew his little secret," smiled the Chief. "And, thinking you were a detective, he was badly upset, for fear he was to be implicated in the bank burglary."



ABEL, who had remained in a state almost bordering on stupefaction during all this, now aroused himself and cried,

"And Roger had nothing to do with the tracks!"

"Not a thing," assured the Chief, chuckling heartily. "Except as his red manuscript gave our friend here the idea of building up trade. And very much surprised Roger must have been when he first saw, or heard of them."

"Well," growled Abel, apparently much disappointed at not having the tracks fastened on Roger, "what's to be done with these men?"

"Oh, nothing," smiled the Chief.

"But it strikes me as being a case where an example ought——"

"I know. But nothing will be done. They've come forward and cleared up the situation so far as they could. It relieves a certain gentleman of a minor charge and permits us to proceed more intelligently. No, nothing is to be said by any of us in regard to this exposé. I've pledged my word for that. As for examples, I'll make one, I assure you, before I've finished!"

"And this is the exposé you promised?" inquired Abel.

"It is," returned the Chief pleasantly. "But after I've reported to you to-night I believe I shall be in position for a better one." Then to McDoty and Kimper: "That is all, gentlemen. I thank you. Rest easy. You'll not be embarrassed in the slightest because of this confidence. Good day."

"And you let me entertain a theory of hush-money!" I complained after they had gone.

"It interested you," pacified the Chief, "and restrained you from leaving the real game to chase rabbits. Now, they're all back to their lettuce and you've bagged the big game."

Abel was obviously disgruntled at this climax. He had decided his brother was guilty of so many things that he now regretted having him cleared of even one. He admitted he would have been better pleased had Roger been proven the guilty person on each charge. Believing, as I did, that he and Roger were in partnership, or had been, I could not view his surprise and disappointment as genuine. He had known all the while that his brother was not in

anyway responsible for the tracks.

That night, at a late hour, the Chief called him up on the telephone and with a world of regret in his voice informed him that no will had been found in the gate-post of the Laboratory House.

CHAPTER XVII

PREPARATIONS

ALTHOUGH we were now nearing the end of the game, no finale was in sight from the surface indications. The Chief had promised the day should bring forth the major exposé, yet the morning was consumed in seeming trivialities. I accompanied Mr. Butterworth in a brief visit to the wounded cashier, and stood aloof while he had a long consultation with Kimper and his hair-invigorator champion, the Sheriff.

We then paid our respects to Miss Vingt. It was the first time the Chief had formally met his client, and I could see he was interested in her odd personality. Appreciating her state of mind, he began by saying,

"I've wanted to inform you that Roger Vingt will leave Swackton to-night."

"For good?" she inquired, her eyes and hands evidencing her eagerness.

"You have seen him for the last time," assured the Chief.

I knew she rejoiced at this intelligence, although she sat very quiet, and simply murmured,

"Abel will be pleased to hear it."

"Abel will not be overmuch surprised," smiled the Chief. Then after a few desultory observations he asked, "Would you permit me to inspect the room above this? I am anxious to ascertain if the chandelier can not be more strongly secured. My assistant tells me it is very heavy. I have an idea it could be bolted through the floor-beams."

"Certainly," she said. "It's very kind of you to think of it. The workmen will be here to-morrow. I'll have the maid show you the way."

"No, no, I can go alone," he insisted. "And I may desire to use the 'phone. My assistant will remain and keep you company."

While Miss Vingt's face remained that of a huge doll, and while her voice held the same monotonous level, it was evident our visit had increased her mental ease greatly. She was happy at the prospect of losing her

kinsman. I wondered whether she would at times secretly long for his cheery, blood-curdling narratives and half hope an occasional mail might bring a manuscript from him. As I indulged in such conjecture we chatted on commonplace topics, never once touching upon the affairs of the estate; and perhaps it stung my vanity a bit that she should so readily realize I had been relegated to the ranks and never again would assume the initiative.

The Chief was absent some minutes, and on his return evidenced his good humor by his old trick of rubbing his hands softly. Beyond saying he would talk with the workmen on the morrow, he offered no suggestions as to how the chandelier should be hung; and I knew he had devoted but little attention to the floor.



ONCE we had gained the street he clapped my shoulder gleefully, and said,

"You erred in giving your first heed to the flooring. The socket could not run away and you had ample leisure to examine into the cause of the accident. In a situation of that kind always first seek to nail down the human agency. The chandelier man, in short, did not escape down the stairs, although he might have done so while you were guarding the immutable boards. He went through the wall into Abel's apartments."

"The division wall is of brick," I reminded.

"Only so far as the second story," corrected the Chief. "The rest of it is the ordinary partition, with the original doors still in place. Of course, in dividing the mansion the doors were nailed up. But I found one, in the room over the chandelier, which has been tampered with and which can be opened with a key."

"Then Roger operated from his brother's home and used it as a rendezvous!" I said.

"It would seem so," agreed the Chief.

"And I thought I heard you using the 'phone," I hinted.

"Yes; I called up Abel on the other side of the house. Had I possessed a key to open the door I should have been tempted to step through and address him in person. I told him I was convinced Roger had been frightened away and was gone for good. And I requested him to accompany us to-morrow in a visit to the Laboratory House,

as I wished to make a thorough search of it."

"Will he go?"

"He agreed with much heartiness that the suggestion was a good one, and he promised to wait on us at any hour I might name. But by to-morrow our business here will be completed and there will be no call for such an investigation."

"Your bid for his company was merely a blind, then?"

"Why, yes. It's sometimes wise to date your excursions far enough ahead to allow any undesirable person, so disposed, to reveal his hand by fussing with the interim. Remember the attempt to anticipate us in the matter of the concealed will?"

"In other words, Roger will be speedily informed of our proposed trip and——"

"Exactly. And will be there to-night," completed the Chief. "Don't forget that when Roger found my dissertation on grapefruit he probably informed Abel, despite his plaint to me that his life had been attempted. Thus, Abel knows we suspect him of collusion, and if the old house contains any secrets an effort will be made to eliminate them—even if we are suspected of planning a trap in our advertisement of to-morrow's quest. Being forewarned, Roger will count on balking us at our own game. If he goes there to-night, it will be with the knowledge that he must dodge us."

"We go alone?"

"No, I'm taking McDoty along."

"Why McDoty?" I asked in some surprise, for the man had never impressed me as being courageous or astute.

"A child might deduce we wanted him to be on hand to make an arrest," returned the Chief dryly. "But I'll confess my only reason is because at one time he worked on a Montana ranch."

"It gets me," I surrendered. "I suppose if Kimper had ever made balloon ascensions we would take him along, too."

"Sarcasm often evidences a sense of defeat," said the Chief smoothly. "Yet I don't mind telling you this much," and he whispered as if fearing the empty street might overhear: "McDoty doesn't know any more about the reason for his going than you do."

I grinned sourly. I can not remember ever eliciting any information from my employer unless he had intended from the first to volunteer it. However, in tumbling me down he usually allowed me to alight on a

cushion; and I suspected he was purposely tantalizing at times just to whet my curiosity.

"One thing you can do," he added, after enjoying my momentary ill humor: "ascertain from Kimper the names of any of the first purchasers of his new brand of soap. While you are about that errand I'll visit the hardware store."

"I can forecast your scheme," I gravely declared. "You will buy nails and hammers, and secure the doors and windows of the Laboratory House after Roger enters, and then leave him to starve to death."

"Hardly that," he whispered, grinning. "I'd planned to purchase oil with which you could set him on fire while I stole the house. Sh! not a word."

I watched him going with only admiration in my gaze: the pup who trees big game by barking should have no room for pique, and I turned into Kimper's.



THE little man was much subdued, but frankly happy. With the mental strain removed he now realized that legitimate advertising pays best, and he was only anxious to pick up the path of his quiet life where the red tracks had violated it. He made no bones of confessing to me all the wiles he had practised. He was a warm supporter of McDoty's candidacy, and his seeming hostility had been but a ruse to evade any suspicion of collusion. He also said that at one time he and the Sheriff suspected me of being the bank burglar!

After he had talked himself out I asked him about the soap.

He wrinkled his brows for a few seconds and then recalled that the jeweler and the cashier were among the first to buy.

"I can't remember any others," he concluded.

"Was Roger Vingt a purchaser?"

He snapped his fingers in irritation, and returned,

"No, but Abel was. How stupid of me to forget! We had a long discussion as to the best kind of soap to use in cleaning his machine."

From the drug-store I went to the insurance office for further instructions. The Chief had none, except to enjoy myself for the day. This I did by dismissing every sense of responsibility, and impatiently waiting for the night—as one awaits a de-

lectable entertainment. Now that the curtain was about to drop on the last act I mingled my longing to witness the dénouement with a strong hankering for Broadway and for a case with metropolitan settings. It seemed as if I had been in Swackton for years.

At last, after the street-lamps had punctuated the gloom with yellow blurs and the dusk on the edge of the village had thickened, the Chief announced that he was ready, and we set forth. We picked up the Sheriff at the end of the street, and from his awkwardness of manner I gathered he was somewhat averse to the adventure. It was also evident he had but a small inkling of why he accompanied us.

Our approach to the Laboratory House was by a new route, one picked by the Chief, taking us across lots to the rear of the building, where occasional trees cast black shadows and allowed us to gain the ell without fear of detection. The moon, only half try-to light the scene, brought into vague relief the open places but did not touch upon us. In fact, at a very short distance even in the open it would have been impossible to recognize any one. Yet the Chief seemed satisfied with a position some twenty feet from the front doors and told us to sit down and wait. As we obeyed he softly removed something from under his coat and pressed it into the dull hands of the Sheriff.

"Make me a running noose," he whispered.

I could almost hear the Sheriff's jaw sag as he received the rope. This, then, was the Chief's purchase at the hardware store.

"There you be," grunted the Sheriff, after a few seconds of skilful manipulation.

"No, keep it," murmured the Chief. "I may want you to recall your cowboy days and make a cast. Could you, in this darkness?"

"Hoof or horn?" asked the Sheriff sentimentously. "I can rope anything that I can hear, even if it's dark as —. I throw about a foot above the noise."

"I depend more on your technique than I could on your theology," returned the Chief. "I'll specify when the time comes."

And McDoty, now waxing enthusiastic, began arranging the rope.

But the time seemed very long; in fact, I was getting drowsy when the Chief nudged us sharply.

A blur was cautiously moving up the

walk. Then came a thin click, click, and I knew it was Roger's cane.

"Shall I snare him?" muttered the Sheriff hungrily.

"Not yet," restrained the Chief. "Wait till he comes out."

As he finished we heard the door creak, and then all was still, except for the insect chorus of the night and our muffled breathing.

"Abel tipped him off," I murmured in the Chief's ear.

"And he's up to something," was his rejoinder.

"He's coming out!" gritted the Sheriff nervously, rising to his feet and swishing the coils softly. And by the noisy manner of his exit it was evident Roger was in a hurry.

With no attempt at secrecy he made for the gate, and even as the Chief cried, "Now!" my nostrils caught a faint whiff of smoke.

"He has fired the house!" I babbled, just as the rope hissed after the incendiary.

Then as a red glow shone through the windows the noose found its victim, as was evidenced by a hoarse cry of rage, and McDoty, settling back, manfully pulled a struggling, blaspheming something toward us.

"Hold him hard!" cried the Chief, dancing on one foot. "Pull! pull!"

"It's Roger!" I bleated, as the now leaping flames cast a ruddy glow over the scene.

"My God!" shrieked the Sheriff. "I've pulled his legs off!"

And for the first time I realized that Roger and Abel Vingt—despite all visual differences—were one and the same individual!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CURTAIN IS DRAWN

WE HAD left the thoroughly astounded Sheriff, sworn to secrecy, watching, with the gathering crowd, the destruction of the Laboratory House. The Chief, Abel and I were now seated behind the locked door of the insurance office. The Chief was mildly jubilant, I was still lost in the depths of bewilderment, and Abel was venomously sullen. His face was a study. He had not bothered to assume the iron-gray locks, the coat of tan and the long scar, so character-

istic of Roger, as he confessed he had expected to meet no one in this, his last appearance in a dual rôle. He could only sit and glare at Mr. Butterworth with an intensity of hatred I had never before seen in a human countenance. With the loss of his artificial legs I believed he had bid good-by forever to the more genial attributes of Roger.

"We have a long bill against you," purred the Chief. "In particular you are bound to answer to me for the following itemized account, viz.: three pistols, one of which spoiled my hat; one falling chandelier, which nearly spoiled my assistant, and one dog-fight."

"Is that all?" choked Abel.

"No," smiled the Chief and speaking gently. "You have to answer to Miss Marilla for one cake of soap, left on the cellar stair with felonious intent, and for one slamming door. You are to answer to Cashier Jelly for one cracked skull; to the village of Swackton for one bank burglary; to Kimper for one spell of nervous prostration and the interruption of a heavy sale of hair-restorer. In all, a heavy bill of particulars."

"Well, go on," snarled Abel.

"There is but little left to mention. You know the terms of the will. Are you ready to abide by them and promise to bring no contest, providing we wipe out the rest of the slate?" asked the Chief pleasantly.

"What's to hinder my contesting it?" growled the defeated man.

"Disregarding all items in my complaint, I'll reply, 'Roger,'" murmured the Chief. "Yes, Roger is a barrier you can't get over. You see, you have created a Frankenstein without teaching it to eat from the hand, and now it turns to rend you."

"The bank burglary is a famous card," I reminded.

"You can prove no burglary on me," cried Abel.

"We know it was you," said the Chief gently. "And while it's not material, you'll confess to it by paying to Cashier Jelly, say, five thousand dollars for his injury. It can be arranged quietly and no one will know, and in a new environment you can start your life of general cussedness anew."

"Meaning I must quit Swackton?"

"Yes, immediately. These are the terms, dictated largely to spare Miss Vingt: settle with Jelly, take your income from the trust

fund of fifty thousand dollars, and vamoose. If it were not for your cousin I should make harsher terms; but she does not know the truth, and never will, if you obey."

"If I must, I must," he groaned.

"You certainly must," assured the Chief.

Abel wiped his bald pate on his sleeve for a few seconds, and then asked,

"Would you mind telling how you suspected my dual identity?"

"Not at all," laughed the Chief. "First, I believed you were in collusion with Roger when you failed to come to the Laboratory House and demand an explanation of the advertisement I had caused to be inserted. Then came your pronounced dislike for publicity and your predilection for duels, which did not seem to harmonize with your economical bent. The fact that you were present at the dog-fight, when the album was stolen, also impressed me as sinister. But what gave me a radical clue to your deviltry was your appearance at the Laboratory House to warn Jethuel, when he was visiting Roger—dear! dear! I can't help but think of you as twins.

"But it was when you warned him in person instead of calling him up on the telephone, coupled with the fact you did not openly enter the house, that opened my eyes. On other occasions you seemed free to meet Roger; on occasions when no third party was present. For early in the game I observed that when Roger appeared you dropped off the map, and vice versa.

"The fact you were always proclaiming that Roger could not act with you in settling the estate, as well as the matter of the blank cartridges, also tended to cement my suspicion into belief. Take the cartridges, for instance: knowing you for a cold-blooded scoundrel and eager to gain at any hazard—why should you aid Roger in an affray which might cost him his life and leave you so much the richer? No, no. You left a trail as broad as Broadway. The only puzzling element was the red tracks. That seemed too idiotic for you to be guilty of."

"Might I ask how long it took you to shift to Abel when you left me alone in the Laboratory House?" I asked.

"About thirty seconds to rub off the stain and scar," he returned sullenly, now seeming ready to reveal all. "And about the same length of time to remove my artificial legs."

"And to make up as Roger?" asked the Chief.

"About the same number of seconds. I had practised until I was very rapid. The limbs only extended from the knees down."

"You certainly had a marvelous retreat," cried the Chief enthusiastically. "Even more secure than 'Mr. Hyde' enjoyed, for it was purely physical, with no tell-tale mental environment. You could glide from one personality into the other in about a minute. Would you mind telling why you burned the house?"

"I had two extra sets of legs there, also an extra machine," he explained in a hoarse mumble. "I knew they'd be found, and the legs, especially, would cause comment. I also had an extra set of legs in my own house. Often I took a pair with me in the machine, and could shift and advance, or retreat as the occasion demanded."

"And in which rôle did you loot the bank?" pursued the Chief.

"As Roger," he muttered, forgetting his former stubbornness.

"And the motive? Remember, it will not be used against you if you comply with my demands."

"I wanted the family record to be in the deposit box when the papers were officially opened in court," he explained in a voice hardly audible. "And I also wanted to get the album to examine at my leisure, as I feared it showed the existence of a will."

"A forged family record, eh? Did you ever have a brother named Roger?" inquired the Chief.

"No," he confessed; "but as Marilla and I were the last of the race I knew I was safe. No one here knew anything about my family history, and Marilla would believe anything I said. I want to state right here that if I hadn't feared my uncle intended to discriminate against me, I should never have conceived the scheme. But I knew he disliked me, and I began to build against the possibility of disinheritance. Then a love of the game got into my blood and I elaborated upon my original scheme. It delighted me, as Roger, to do those things I would never have done as Abel. I took pride in being diametrically opposed in the two rôles. And if it hadn't been for that — Kimper and his silly tracks, I would have won clear and obtained at least two-thirds of the estate."

"When did you first suspect I was working on the case?" I asked, smiling complacently.

"Bah!" he sneered. "You're a cub. I knew the first time I saw you, when you said Roger telephoned into your home office in regard to the realty."

"You should have been an actor," sighed the Chief. "I only regret I could not study your face when you read my excerpt on grapefruit. I shall always wonder whether the Roger traits or the Abel traits predominated. By the way, did you ever travel in those Southern climes you so often depicted while posing as your own brother?"

"I got my knowledge by reading," he returned, almost proudly. "I was never outside the State."

"Beautiful! beautiful!" eulogized the Chief. "I fear it will be a long time before I meet an opponent so captivating."

"Well, I guess I've answered enough questions," he cried, with what for him was much vehemence. "Is the inquisition over? May I go? Shall all that's transpired remain between ourselves?"

"It's all completed," soothed the Chief. "It was a duel. McDoty will keep close because of his connection with the tracks. Jethuel and I will be silent because of Miss Vingt; only living in hope we two shall meet again, sometime, under as pleasing conditions. Roger, of course, was destroyed in the fire."

"I will go away as soon as I can dispose of my house," he promised. "I couldn't bear to live here, where my dear brother met his death."

"Your sorrow will cause you to depart inside of seven days," informed the Chief. "And please see to it that the door entering Miss Vingt's home is walled up before a new tenant succeeds you. You've killed Roger Vingt, even as he feared."

"Good night," said Abel, resuming his crutches and hitching to the door.

"We return to New York on the morning train, Jethuel," advised the Chief wearily. "I have a very pretty case for you to work on."

And thus the most astounding rascal I had ever encountered passed out of my life; and thus ended the trail of the Crimson Tracks, and thus was ended up all the strange revelations the tracks unwittingly led to.

the Camp-Fire



A meeting—
place for
Readers,
Writers and
Adventurers

OF COURSE, I have had a few," says William Patterson White, whose "News of De Wet" is in this number, "but not a single one of them was thrilling, except one." He is speaking of adventure, he it said. "This one was when I was riding on a freight and had to jump when the train was running between thirty and forty miles an hour. This may not seem exciting, but it was to me. I picked slag ballast out of myself for some little time afterward."

Mr. White may not have had many adventures that he calls thrilling, but he has seen a deal of the world and when he writes his stories there's more than mere imagination behind them. In response to the all-get-acquainted, good-fellowship spirit of the Camp-Fire, he gives the following brief account of his experiences.

I have been abroad twice and went to school in Paris and Lausanne. I spent a summer in Fribourg, Switzerland, and part of another in Italy. I have worked in a telegraph office, the Baldwin Locomotive works (in the shops), and on engineer corps, both in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. I was a rodman in West Virginia the Summer of 1903—the Summer the smallpox visited that section. I have worked in a bookstore as a salesman. I lived in Idaho nearly two years. In Idaho I worked in a planing mill—I have fed more planers and matchers than I care to think about. I also packed shingles, loaded freight cars, and handled the ribbons on a lumber wagon. In other words, I was a teamster. I finally became so proficient in the art of driving a team that I could haul eighty bunches of shingles over a very rough road and not lose a shingle.

When I returned East I found jobs scarce. I took

what I could get. The B. R. T. seemed to have the only opening; I worked on the Brooklyn Rapid Transit—on a construction gang. I pulled cable, mixed mortar, cut threads on pipe, and, lying on my stomach on top of a few boards laid over live cables, drilled through stonework. I enjoyed life in this manner for seven or eight months. The enjoyment palled finally (we worked seven days in the week), and I found a place as draughtsman. I stayed at my drawing-board for nearly three years.

At present I am living in the country near Huntington, Long Island, with two saddles and a red polo pony. I like to roam about, though, so I suppose I shall wander on somewhere else.

I HAPPENED to be with the militia during the Telluride troubles," writes R. C. Pitzer, who gives us "Rafferty's Gleaning," "and Raff (I believe his name was——) told me this story as a Georgetown exploit of his. He had been a 'mucker,' but constitutionally he was 'agin work,' and most of his adventures, I believe, were encountered, not from any desire to do something, but from a great desire to do nothing at all, and to secure the means of doing it. I had a glimpse of him as a street-cleaner in Los Angeles, but, as Mr. Kipling used to say——"

Mr. Pitzer's father was a Colorado pioneer, he tells me. "As boy and young man I have spent many a Summer month with him, in the happy pretense of prospecting. The Western 'hills' still seem home to me, and the ranchers, miners and peripatetic prospectors still are very real in recollection."

FRANK H. WALKER, the young author of "The Luck that Came to Donovan," finds his adventures after hours in a Chicago banking-house.

The city is full of them, if only one will search. Among the police-courts, the jails, the lodging-houses, in the streets, I find mine—life, real life, and, with it, adventure, tragedy, pathos, humor. Having friends at headquarters, I have accompanied raiding parties on gambling-houses, dens of vice, opium-joints; have been where bullets and fists and police-clubs were flying fast in heated battle.

Friends tell me my "nosiness" will some time get me into trouble. I know it. Twice already I have alone faced a revolver in the hands of a criminal; was once drugged in an opium-den—a real one, not one preserved solely for slummers—robbed and thrown into the street; kicked out of a lodging-house for seeming too "nosey;" been with detectives on "shadow work," etc.

Adventure? I live for it, I seek it, and here, in Chicago, I find it, as any one who has searched for it here will know.

IN THE July Camp-Fire I said Frederick William Wallace was, at that writing, off the Banks of Newfoundland on board the fishing schooner *Dorothy M. Smart*. Here is a bit out of a letter I received from up in the Province of Quebec:

I received your letter after my return from the Winter fishing trip. I had a pretty "tough" time, but it was an enjoyable one, and I brought back a lot of first-hand dope about Winter fishing as well as a fine silver-mounted briar and amber pipe presented to me by my shipmates. I appreciate that a great deal more than anything I ever got.

The toughest part of my trip was having to sleep on a hardwood locker without a mattress all the time we were at sea. The little schooner was carrying a ten-dory gang—a total of twenty-four men including myself, and there were bunks enough for only twenty-one. Two men slept in the comparative comfort of the run—a space aft of the cabin and between the deck and the counter—and I could have had their berths, but I said I could sleep without difficulty anywhere. I had occasion to prove my words on that narrow locker, and it was no joke for a day or two when she started slamming around, but I soon got used to it and the men themselves marveled at the way I could knock out a "caulk," and swore that I had some kind of sucker arrangement on my body to keep from sliding off when she pitched. A bunk for me in future Winter trips!

I note that you were leaving for the Canal Zone in your last letter. You would be sweltering in a panama and white drill, while I was freezing in oilskins and rubber boots, I guess, for we had some cold weather.

Mr. Wallace spends much of his time on the water. He comes of a race of sailors, and the sea is in his blood. Wherefore when you read one of his yarns you can rest easy

that the local color is the real thing and that his people are true to life. For instance, the rescuer of the "Stray Sheep," who is, of course, the hero of that other tale of the "harvesters of the shoals" in the July number, "The Making Good of Skipper Winslow:"

The "Harry Winslow" of the yarn is drawn from a young fishing skipper I sailed with in September last. This man made a bid for a vessel when he was only twenty-one, and getting an old schooner, made good, and has done so ever since. In a modest letter I have from him, he tells me that he is the "high-liner" for the year out of the Southern Nova Scotia "shacking" fleets. He was a good sail-carrier too, and I was with him in a race we had against a smart vessel commanded by another older and experienced skipper, and when we defeated him the vanquished captain was so enraged that he offered to bet his whole share in his own vessel against two hundred dollars from ours. The bet was not taken up, but all this Winter, so far, these two rivals have been racing out and home from Brown's Bank and affording a great deal of excitement to those interested.

The other characters are also drawn from life, while the fishing and many of the incidents are taken from my own log-books.

The fishermen are great sportsmen and will race their vessels upon every opportunity. Their recklessness and daring are pretty well known, and are true enough, as I can vouch personally.

"GOT as far as '*Cum esset Cæsar*' in school before work—manual labor—claimed me for its own; which sad misfortune came upon me the very day Mr. Corbett reduced the Hon. Sullivan to his lowest terms. Followed fifteen years of labor." Thus speaks J. M. Allen from Topeka, Kansas, after briefly stating that he was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1875, and was brought West in 1882.

That isn't all about Mr. Allen—not all he told me, nor all there will be to tell later. But this time I'll only add that most of the facts back of "A Legitimate Double-Cross" were told to Mr. Allen by the original of Speakeasy, who was an eye-witness of the main event.

DEAR MR. HOFFMAN:

I have already told you that the "majority" of me is Scotch-Irish and something of those hard-headed forerunners of mine who "gang awa in the ships to look for gault in the new country." Ohio and Indiana took them to their early arms, and they thrived, not being adventurous to any extent; but, intermingling with that cold blood, came a distant tiny strain of Spanish on my father's mother's side, which, coming to me, cropped out in those "whispers in the night" I have told you of. So when I was twelve I ran away from home, getting only a

hundred miles the first attempt, it is true, but instilling a large-sized dose of the "wanderlust" that has never diminished.

And so I have had a look at the world toward the West, having been in Hot Springs when the town was "wide-open," at Mardi Gras when the wine outrivaled the lights, in Puerto Cortez when lives were sold for a dollar, in Nagasaki where the jinrickshas and geisha girls are thicker than fleas in New Jersey, and in Chefu with "Jackie Ashore." I soldiered in Jefferson Barracks, Walla Walla, Washington; Presidio, San Francisco; Manila, and the island of Mindanao; and have been in Honolulu, Guam, the South Seas, etc., as well as having been in most Northern States along the Canadian border.

Inclination has never taken me east of Pittsburgh, so New York will no doubt contain some surprises for me some day. Like the "Virginian," though, I have almost come to say that nothing save death and marriage can surprise me any more—the human race is too complex a problem to engender surprise at anything you may find them doing once you have been "amongst" them.

Lest you get the impression that I am an old man, though, I will tell you that I am a "mighty young" one, being still under thirty. Nor has soldiering, steam-shoveling, breaking wild horses—"wrangling"—firing on the road, or occasional flights on the "airship" into new and alluring regions, aged me any. I loved athletics too well, especially football, and though injured repeatedly at that game, my health has always remained, until recently, superb.

This is Donald Francis McGrew, writing from my own home town, Columbus, Ohio, though after reading "Filipinitis" you wouldn't need to be told that the author knew what he was talking about or that his blood was a good healthy red color.

FROM Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Mr. A. W. McLean, writes as follows concerning Mr. Huffman's exciting experiences as set forth in "Through Perilous Peru" some time ago in ADVENTURE:

I have a friend in town who spent several years as a mining engineer in Peru. I told him the whole story. I noticed him smile in a knowing way, and suspected that he thought the whole thing a fake. When I had concluded, he said: "I was one of the engineers at the parting dinner at the club of which he speaks." His name is Allan McDonald, and when Allan says a thing you can rely upon it.

NOW look at this postscript from a letter written by Frederick William Wallace from Montreal:

P. S. Met an old friend of mine who was down in Manaos on the Amazon in Brazil. He had just got back, half dead with malaria, and when I told him of Russell Huffman's expedition he was highly interested. Where he was, in San Something-or-other, they were looking for that American expedition. I told him the account as given in ADVENTURE and it was a piece of news to him.

By Manaos he undoubtedly means the state not the town of that name, and where San Something-or-other may be is naturally somewhat in doubt—the expedition, you may remember, finally came out at Massasea—but at least it is certain, and something of a coincidence, that we have chance outside word, through quite different sources, from both the Atlantic and Pacific ends of the expedition.

L EONARD MATTERS, several of whose stories are now in ADVENTURE's locker, dropped in on us on his way from San Francisco to England and, later, Egypt and the Upper Nile. A fine custom, this of dropping in on us, and in full accord with the spirit that underlies our Camp-Fire—real acquaintance and good-fellowship. An acquaintance is better than a stranger, and a friend better than an acquaintance.

U NFORTUNATELY the writer gave neither his name nor address. So we reply through the "Camp-Fire," giving both the letter and Mr. Fischer's answer to Mr. Olds's note enclosing the inquiry to him. Mr. Fischer is the artist who has done a number of ADVENTURE's recent covers, and the inquirer is quite right in thinking that he was once a deep-sea sailor.

EDITOR OF ADVENTURE:—I would like to know about Anton Otto Fischer. I have heard that he was a sailor in his younger days. I was shipmates with Anton Fischer in the Fall of 1873 on the Bark *Union* from Liverpool to Pensacola. She was a Limejuicer and we had to jump her to leave her. We hit the mud for Mobile, but up on the Perdido River we struck some piney woods hoosiers making timber and we staid there all Winter. Come Spring I wanted to move toward salt water, but Tony wasn't ready, but said he would follow me in a week (he had a girl), so I went to Mobile, but he never showed up, and if he is following me yet he has made some awful crooked tracks. Will you find out if this is my Fischer? My name then was Harry Stewart, but I won't be sure. I have had so many different names. But names don't count. He would surely remember the Perdido.

MY DEAR MR. OLDS:—Received your note with the enclosed letter, which furnished me some amusement. Considering that I was born in 1882, I am hardly the same Anton Fischer, and my father, to my knowledge, never saw salt water, coming from mountain-peasant stock. The only other Anton Fischer I have ever heard of went to jail, I believe. I have to pass up the honor of being at all connected with the Anton Fischer mentioned by the writer.

Very truly yours,
ANTON OTTO FISCHER.

"THE Missionaries had taught Nicholas how to write his name," says Ledward Rawlinson in reference to his story in this number. "It was a laborious struggle of fifteen or twenty minutes to write the one word, but when he got through he was immensely proud of himself."

Nicholas, the "vagabond Indian," attached himself to Mr. Rawlinson's staff as personal servant within an hour of the latter's arrival in Bolivia. "Old man Quinn, a Californian, had taken him out to the mountains on a prospecting trip, and forever afterward Nicholas swore allegiance to the white men."

Of course Mr. Rawlinson's story is fiction, not fact; but he used to watch "the little monkey gaze with piteous eyes across that bleak, barren plateau, 13,000 feet high, to where the Cordilleras separated us from a dense, tropical jungle, one of the finest rubber and hardwood countries in the world." So he *had* to write the story.

The author, too, gives us still another thread connecting with "Through Perilous Peru," for he was employed along with two of the party, R. M. Brown and McCrea, on the construction of the Viacha-Oruro line in Bolivia.

While as for doing other things—well, he's another of the Camp-Fire circle whose life-story marks up the map of the big, round world till it looks like a demented spider's web.

HERE'S a man who is being a writer so as to get enough money to be a farmer. That isn't quite true, either, for he gave up a position as assistant secretary of a life-insurance company to devote his time to writing. I think what William Tillinghast Eldridge is really driving at is to make a living out-of-doors. Even as a writer he has been spending his Summers at his camp on Lake Winnepesaukee under the Ossipee Mountains in New Hampshire, and a couple of years ago he remained in camp all Winter to gather material for a novel, though that may have been only an excuse.

What I want to know is whether, having read the first instalment of the new three-part serial, "The Island of the Beloved," you have found out which of the various interesting people who might be suspected was really responsible for the dead man by the roadside. Personally, I didn't find out till Mr. Eldridge got good and

ready to tell me at the end of the story, and I'm anxious to know whether I'm stupider than all the rest of you or whether he has spun his yarn with unusual cleverness.

CAPTAIN W. ROBERT FORAN once laid in my hands a veritable bale of original documents, mostly of an official nature, covering his service under the English Government in British East Africa and elsewhere. It isn't often your true adventurer is methodical enough to collect visible proofs of his experiences and carry them around with him. Making sure that he is the real thing generally involves considerably more trouble than examining documentary evidence.

In this case I already knew about the man through other people, but the documentary evidence was exceedingly interesting in itself, for those little sheets of paper were the tantalizingly suggestive index of a life crammed full to overflowing with adventure in the richest sense of the word. Here is one, for example, chosen at random—brief, formal, official, without detail:

No. 241-Ic

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
KISUMU

Sir:

February 20, 1908

On the conclusion of your services connected with the recent revolt, etc., in the Kisii country, I desire to express to you my appreciation of the manner in which you have carried out the various duties committed to your charge.

I have not failed to convey to H. E. the Governor the expressions contained above.

A copy of this letter is being sent to the Inspector General of Police.

I am, sir,
Your obedient Servant,
(signed) JOHN AINSWORTH
Provincial Commissioner

Captain W. R. Foran,
District Supt. of Police
Kisumu.

The above takes on added significance when we consider that being a District Superintendent of Police in British East Africa is "some job." It comes fairly close to being a czar, though it isn't exactly like being a superintendent of police in the United States. For example, Captain Foran was in charge of the Kisumu Province in 1904-5 and 1907-8. The Kisumu Province is a little matter of 50,000 or 60,000 square miles of wild country; 18,000 of it was actually administered; other areas, unopened territory, were covered, and the responsibility extended over the whole of it. It contains nearly

2,000,000 natives. To control this vast territory he had about 500 native police. As to the "services connected with the recent revolt, etc., in the Kisii country," they involved marching 50 of his men 84 miles in 48 hours, his porters with 60 to 70 pound loads on their heads, and his police carrying 200 rounds of ammunition per man, and relieving Kisii Station from the hostile attentions of some 5,000 natives.

Now if we were to devote all the 224 pages of some month's *ADVENTURE* to Captain Foran, it might be possible to present a fairly comprehensive idea of what the man has been through. In this issue he talks about another real adventurer, but gradually, through his own articles and stories and in the course of general conversation around the Camp-Fire, we'll manage to get pretty well acquainted with him and hear a good many things that are worth hearing.

IF I WEREN'T sure you have made mistakes now and then yourself, I should feel worse than I do. The novelette in *ADVENTURE* for June, 1911, was "The Emerald Buddha," by Frederick Arnold Kummer. The novelette in *ADVENTURE* for July, 1912, was "The Tear of Buddha," by Frank Lovell Nelson. In referring to the latter in the July "Camp-Fire" I gave it the title of the former. Reason for so doing unknown. It may have been brain-fag. It may have been original sin. It may even have been a plain, ordinary, common or garden mistake. Anyhow it was unintentional and I beg to set matters right.

I suppose I needn't tell you that "The Emerald Buddha" is out in book form under the title of "The Green God."

TO ME there is a peculiar appeal in Nevil G. Henshaw's tales of Louisiana. Not only because they are excellently told, but because that country somehow holds for me a particular charm, though I have seen only so much of it as can be seen from a train to New Orleans and in that quaint old city itself. Perhaps it is the people even more than the land. I like the South and I like the French and Spanish who are so identified with the history of Louisiana and other States along the Mississippi. I like—but undoubtedly nobody cares especially whether I do or not. The point is that over the country of Mr. Henshaw's stories there

hovers, for most of us, a spirit of romance and quaintness and likableness, and we enjoy hearing about it and meeting its people.

I THINK most of us like to read about the South in general, for that matter—Northerners as well as Southerners. The South has been the home of splendid things and will be again—is coming again into her own. In a matter of months the Civil War will be half a century behind us. Even very bitter things begin to lose their bitterness in half a hundred years. I think that in the North the bitterness has gone utterly away. Perhaps it is only reasonable to expect the South to be slower in forgiving, and yet it is in matters of the spirit that the South has been her greatest. Perhaps, in proportion to injuries received, the South will be the quicker of the two to forgive what is past.

No, I haven't just wandered into a general discussion. I'm only getting on slowly.

My people live in the North and fought in the Union Army. If I had to make the bitter choice, I should do as they did. I believe the South was mistaken in her sincere beliefs. Perhaps she wasn't, but that is the way I happen to see it.

But—and now I approach my point—there is that about the "Lost Cause" that appeals to my sympathies and imagination as few things appeal. Northerner or no Northerner, I can not withhold my admiration from a people who poured out the last drop of their heart's blood in a losing struggle against superior force, and did it with an heroic devotion and chivalrous fire that can not be surpassed in all the records of history. And they were Americans.

I mean that, in one manner of speaking, my sympathies are with the "Lost Cause."

NOW I quite realize that my own feelings in the matter are of practically no importance. But, so far as I can judge, these same feelings are shared by practically all Northerners of the present day. That gives them a great deal of importance.

Which brings me back to where I began—that most of us like to read about the South. The War built a fence between the two sections, but the years have rotted the fence away and the War itself now seems only to lend an added interest and an added admiration.

RETURNING to the quiet parishes of Louisiana and to Mr. Henshaw and his story in this number. In response to my request for his own story at the Camp-Fire, he writes, from his home in Charlottesville, Virginia, as follows:

I was born in 1880 at St. Louis, Missouri, of which city my ancestors, the Chouteaus and the Gratiots, were the pioneers, and from them I have at least, as you might say, inherited many adventures of the most exciting description.

I was educated in private schools in this State, and my college is the University of Virginia.

My real home, though, up to the past five years, has been in New Iberia, Louisiana, where as a child I have seen some rather exciting times. The regulating of the darkies—which at one time culminated in a pitched battle—the feuds and political duels of the hot-headed French and Spanish, the never-to-be-forgotten yellow-fever epidemics, all of them contributed their share in the molding of a very crude and primitive section of this country.

Then there is always the memory of the pirate Lafitte, with his continually sought and never found treasure, and the innumerable incidents of the camp and hunting-field. Perhaps I remember most vividly being marooned upon the Texas coast one fall by a hurricane that—

But he says he may turn that experience into a story—which I trust will appear in *ADVENTURE*—so I shall not discount the interest of that tale by telling it in advance. Instead, here is what he has to say about the present story, "A Pair of Mules." (I try not to praise *ADVENTURE*'s stories around the Camp-Fire, even when one strikes me as an especially fine piece of workmanship, so I'll merely venture the comment that "A Pair of Mules" seems the French rather than the American type of short story, and to me is strongly suggestive of De Maupassant. If this kind of comment bores you, just go back and skip it.)

In regard to the story, it is purely fancy, although the charbon mentioned in it, and the drastic methods used to prevent spread of the disease, were often enough a terrible reality to the Louisiana planter. They now have a serum, however, which renders such methods unnecessary—so I am told.

The dead sailor was suggested to me in part by an episode in one of the great fever epidemics of many years ago. At that time a certain part of the river, below New Orleans, was entirely free from the scourge, on account of its wonderful quarantine which nothing suspicious was able to pass. One day a ship came up the river from the Gulf, drifting sideways. It was immediately taken as a prize

and brought ashore, where it was found to be deserted. In less than two weeks the immune portion in which it lay was entirely wiped out.

HORACE J. WEST located the famous Christmas Diggings in Kern County, California, in 1892; later the rich Quartzite property near Yuma; discovered the old St. Louis workings at Searchlight, Nevada; saw Goldfield in its infancy, and the Gold Roads discovery in Arizona. For over twenty years he has followed discovery after discovery and knows, and is known by, most of the mining men who have pursued the precious metals of the West. And, as stated last month, it is he who has gathered the data for "Lost Mines of the Great Southwest," by J. D. Minster.

MAX RITTENBERG, one of the Australians who gather round the Camp-Fire and the man who gives us the John Hallard stories—"A Case for the Big Stick" is the one in this issue—besides being journalist, editor and writer, is equally handy with golf-club, tennis-racquet, fencing-saber, helm of a racing yacht, or with his fists, and is partial to an occasional "scrap." Above all, a confirmed wanderer. Take it all in all, it's a combination that ought to produce interesting results. And it does. Some day, just by way of a sample, we'll have the story of his fight with a London underground railroad.

ONE "Camp-Fire" talk, a bit of history, will be found on page 2.

JOHAN A. AVIRETTE, several times a contributor to *ADVENTURE*, dropped in to see us not long ago, direct from Mexico and some exciting adventures amid the general unpleasantness there. I had known him before only through friends and correspondence, and my visit with him was not only a pleasant one but exceedingly interesting. When he was fourteen Mr. Avirette left his home in Bourbon County, Kentucky, and went West; since then he has roamed the whole of creation. Miner, writer, soldier, scout, poet, revolutionist, mining engineer. And a man.

— ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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Maximilian Foster certainly wrote one ripping good yarn when he wrote "Old Mammy Cruel." You might with sincerity call it a little masterpiece. It's a haunting tale of the San Francisco water-front, with a weird creep to it that reminds you of Stevenson. Full of suspense, feeling, unexpected twists and a climax that Sherlock himself couldn't have foreseen.

But there's nothing weird about "Oh, You Babylon," by **Julian Street**. It's intensely amusing. Mr. Street has fearlessly tracked the popular Cabaret to its lair—several lairs in fact. And has written a very funny account of what he saw, heard and otherwise endured during his investigations. Humorously, he shows up the Cabaret in its true electric light.

Montague Glass, the genial creator of that inimitable pair, "Petash and Perlmutter," has temporarily deserted the cloak and suit world to take an amusing flight into the realm of the Judiciary. In "The Ends of Injustice" he has "staged" a mighty original situation. You'll laugh with the Judge when he discovers the unsuspected relationship between Justice and Domestic Economy.

Then there's a great big two-part article dealing with the Panama Canal. One on the personal element that helped build it (a stirring eulogy on Col. Goethals, by **Peter Clark McFarlane**). And the other by **John L.** and **Gertrude S. Mathews** on the effect the Canal will have on Commerce and Civilization. **Joseph Pennell** has done some wonderful drawings for this article.

And now look at some of the names of other contributors we can only mention—**Marguerite Audoux** (Author of "Marie Claire"), **Gouverneur Morris**, **Kathleen Norris**, **Walter Prichard Eaton**, **Frederick I. Anderson** and **Leavitt Ashley Knight**.

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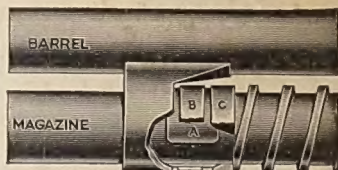
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